



# Unit 6. The Late Modern English period (1700-1900)

History of the English Language (G5061322)

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## 6.1. Socio-historical introduction

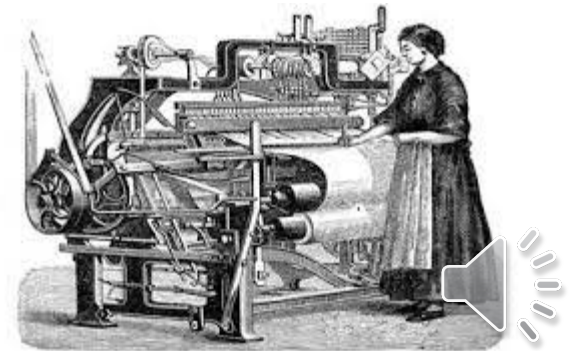
6.2. Codification and standardisation: Grammars, dictionaries and the rise of RP

6.3. Scientific writing and scientific vocabulary

6.4. Main features of the language in the period

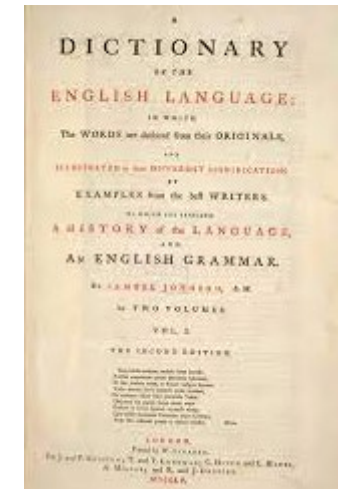
## 6.1 Socio-historical introduction

- **LModE** is marked by the **Restoration of the monarchy** (1660, Charles II) and the **Glorious Revolution** (1688, replacing James II by William of Orange and Mary). Supremacy of the parliament over the monarchy (**constitutional monarchy**) and increasing democratisation.
- **The British Isles** → **Union** of England and **Scotland** (**Act of Union 1707**); union **with Ireland** (1801), later on dissolved with the creation of the free Irish state in 1921.
- Industrial Revolution → mechanisation of labour (introduction of the steam engine and the power loom) and changes in the **life conditions of the working population**.



## 6.1 Socio-historical introduction

- Emergence of a **new ruling class based on wealth** (plutocracy) → language and manners to distinguish between the gentry and the new rich.
- Importance of **grammars and pronouncing dictionaries**.
- Expansion of the lower middle class and emergence of an **urban working class**.



## 6.1 Socio-historical introduction

- Depopulation of the countryside and growing urbanisation. **Growth of towns**, especially in the Midlands and North (e.g. **Manchester, Birmingham, Liverpool**).
- Improvement of transport → **roads, railways and canals** facilitate the migration of the rural population to the cities (**London** = centre of culture).
- Advances in the media of **written and spoken communication** → emergence of newspapers and magazines; from the 1840s telegraph and telephone. End of 19<sup>th</sup> c. → radio



## 6.1 Socio-historical introduction

- **Increase of education**, also among women. Emergence of **new 'red brick' universities** in cities that had become important as a consequence of the Industrial Revolution (Durham, Manchester, Liverpool, also London).
- Age of **rationalism** → Foundation of the Royal Society (1660) promoting scientific and rational discourse.
- Advances in sciences → growing importance of **scientific writing** (plain style: language should be logical, orderly and symmetrical).
- **Loss of the British colonies in America (1776)**, but emergence of the **British Empire** (1<sup>st</sup> settlements in Australia in 1788, New Zealand, India, and South Africa)



6.1. Socio-historical introduction

**6.2. Codification and standardisation: Grammars, dictionaries and the rise of RP**

6.3. Scientific writing and scientific vocabulary

6.4. The expansion of English beyond the British Isles.

6.5. Main features of the language in the period

## 6.2 Codification and standardisation: Grammars, dictionaries and the rise of RP

- The **18th century** is marked by the efforts to **standardise, refine and fix** the English language.

[T]he eighteenth-century grammarians undertook the process of ascertainment, which entailed ridding English of doubts and uncertainties. This was a tripartite process. First, they wished to **standardize the language**, codify the rules, settle disputed points, and **establish a standard of correct use**. Second, they wished to **refine the language**, remove supposed defects and common errors, **halt certain bad tendencies, and introduce improvements** if necessary. Finally, they wanted to **fix the language permanently** in the desired form and **prevent further changes**. (Brinton and Arnovik 2006: 361-2)



## 6.2.1. An academy

- The best way to achieve ascertainment was by the **establishment of an Academy to regulate language** → Model of Italy (*Accademia della Crusca*, 1582), France (*Académie Française*, 1636); Spain (*Real Academia de la Lengua Española*, 1713), which had published dictionaries and grammars.
- The creation an Academy of the English Language was **supported by influential men of letters of the time**, like John Dryden, Daniel Defoe, Joseph Addison.
- In 1664 the Royal Society created a committee aiming to improve language, but the idea of an **Academy was not successful in England**.



## 6.2.2. Ascertaining the language

- In England **language** was **fixed not by** means of **an academy**, it was rather a consequence of the **efforts of individuals**, who set out to fix and purify the language, “self-appointed experts, who considered themselves qualified to make pronouncements about the structure of language” (Brinton and Arnovik 2006: 359).
- Writers (e.g. Ben Jonson, Daniel Defoe, Jonathan Swift, Samuel Johnson), clergymen (Robert Lowth), and (wo)men of letters (Ann Fisher or Noah Webster).
- The **18th century** is the **Age of Prescriptivism** → grammarians started to establish rules for the use of language, determining what was right (prescribing) and wrong (proscribing) → **Doctrine of Correctness**.

## 6.2.2. Ascertaining the language

- A very **influential grammarian** of the period was **Robert Lowth**, who applied Latin grammar to English. In his *Short Introduction to English Grammar* (1762) he introduced rules such as *It is I* rather than *It is me*, rules for the use of *who/m*, *between* and *among*, *shall* and *will*.
- Commonly grammars had appendixes with **exercises of ‘bad English’**, pointing out common errors and correcting them.

Q. Is it good English to say *most fairest*?

A. No: you ought to say, *fairest* or *most fair*. (Anne Fischer, ?1745)

## 6.2.2. Ascertaining the language

- The **fixing of language** was done:
  - By their own **authority**: ‘this is not English’, ‘we must not say’...
  - by the authority of the **best writers and men of letters**.
  - by the **model of the classical languages**: highly inflected languages were greatly valued at the time (Latin as a model especially concerning case usage: It is I instead of *It is me*, *between you and me* instead of *between you and I*).
  - by attending to **etymology**, since it was believed that the etymological meaning of a word had a certain authority over the current one.
  - by applying **reason and logical rules**. (e.g. avoiding double negatives, double comparatives or superlatives)
  - by having **one form for one meaning** (e.g. distinguishing adjectives from adverbs *\*real good*, or preterites and past participles *\*I have saw*).

## 6.2.2. Ascertaining the language

### Doctrine of usage

- Some grammarians (e.g. Joseph Priestley and Noah Webster), however, maintained that the **grammar** of a language **should be derived from what people actually wrote and spoke**, what they called 'custom', as opposed to 'reason'.
- Such grammarians defended the idea that the **regulation of language cannot be imposed from outside**. The only eighteenth century grammarians consistently following usage were Priestley and **Webster**.

## 6.2.2. Ascertaining the language

### Dictionaries

- The most important dictionary in the **18th century** is **Samuel Johnson's *Dictionary of the English Language (1755)***, with ca. 44,000 word. He used evidence from existing dictionaries, from words heard in conversation and he included illustrative quotations.
- **Noah Webster's *American Dictionary of the English Language (1828)*** → a best-seller in the United States. Webster intended to establish an American norm for the language, independent from the British standard.
- 1857: The **Philological Society** sets up the Unregistered Words Committee to produce a lexicon of words and idioms not yet registered → data collection with the help of the public.
- The ***New English Dictionary on Historical Principles***: The germ of the ***Oxford English Dictionary***

1884: 1st fascicle (A-ANT); 1928: 1<sup>st</sup> edition (10 vol.)



## 6.2.3. The rise of RP

- In EModE, the **speech of London**, the **Universities** and the **educated classes** is regarded as the **prestigious** model for **pronunciation**.
- The process of selection of **standard pronunciation** started in the 16th century, but its **codification** and implementation did not take place until the **second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century**.
- Emergence of **pronouncing dictionaries** (e.g. Thomas Sheridan's (1780) *General Dictionary of the English Language*, Daniel Jones's *Pronouncing Dictionary* in 1917)).
- 'Vulgar' (esp. Cockney) and 'provincial' pronunciations (regional accents) were considered 'improper' (e.g. /h/-dropping).
- **End of the 19th century** → **Received Pronunciation (RP)** promoted at the great public **schools and the Universities**. It originated in the prestigious educated accent of London, but it became a class accent, used all over the country by people from a particular social class.

6.1. Socio-historical introduction

6.2. Codification and standardisation: Grammars, dictionaries and the rise of RP

**6.3. Scientific writing and scientific vocabulary**

6.4. Main features of the language in the period



## 6.3. Scientific writing and scientific vocabulary

- In LModE Latin had completely given way to **English as the language of science and scholarship** → rise of **scientific English**.
- The '**plain style**' in scientific texts (e.g. decrease in the use of the passive).
- Development of life-sciences → introduction of botany, zoology and chemistry terms (*albino, coleoptera, fauna, hydrogen, molecule, nitrogen*)



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### The progressive:

- LModE → restriction of the **simple present to express habits and states** and the **progressive** for present **ongoing actions**.
- Also combination of the **progressive passive** (e.g. *the cake is being baked*) and occurrence of the **progressive with the main verb *be*** (e.g. *you are being clever*)

### Passives:

- The ***get-passive*** was first recorded in the mid 17th c., but was not common until the 19th c.
- The **indirect and prepositional passives** become more frequent in the period.

*John was given a watch on his retirement.*

*The terms were agreed to (by us).*

## 6.4. Main features of the language in the period

### The *be going to* future:

- LModE development → **originally with motion verbs** (e.g. *He is going to see her*) > **later** indicating a **future purpose** and **expansion to other verbs**.

### The subjunctive:

- **Demise of the subjunctive inflection** and **replacement by modal auxiliaries**. Subjunctive retained **only in fixed expressions** (*suffice it to say, God bless you, if I were you, though he be late*)

## 6.4. Main features of the language in the period

### Borrowings:

- **Latin, Greek, and French** continue as sources of loanwords, but **greater variety of (non)Indo-European languages**, as a result of the expansion of English over the globe.

**Latin and Greek:** *ultraviolet, multilingual, television, neonatal, antibiotic, bronchitis, enzyme, bonus, alias, item;*

**French:** *massage, gourmet, sauté, risqué, morale, café, genre;*

**Celtic languages:** *leprechaun, shamrock, blarney, brogue;*

## 6.4. Main features of the language in the period

### Borrowings:

**Spanish:** *taco, ranch, canyon, rodeo;*

**Italian:** *piano, sonata, artichoke, pasta, salami, spaghetti, piazza;*

**German:** *kindergarten, seminar, strudel, leitmotif;*

**Russian:** *vodka, borscht*

**Others** → Japanese (*judo, tycoon*), Chinese (*feng shui, ginseng*), Hungarian (*goulash, paprika*), Arabic (*kebab, mecca*), North American indigenous languages (*kayak, toboggan, caribou*).

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