LEVEL 1B ENGLISH LANGUAGE & LINGUISTICS

*From Early Modern English (EModE) to Present-Day English (PDE)*

As I flagged at the beginning of last week’s ‘lecture pack’, in the lectures for this course-component TWO linked RECORDED videos of around 20 minutes each are posted on the Moodle site at the beginning of each week. A full script for this recorded material, plus the accompanying slides, is posted to accompany the videos. Students are asked to watch these lectures ANYTIME over the following three days, when convenient to them.

There will then, at the class hour (1500 on Thursdays) be a dedicated LIVE drop-in Q&A session relating to this material, which students are strongly advised to attend. I will also include in these LIVE sessions, if time remains after Q&As are covered, some images illustrating contemporary culture; please note that this material is for background interest only, and will NOT BE EXAMINED. I will post these images on the Moodle site after the LIVE event.

*1. Major changes between EModE and LModE*

1.0 Although the transition from EModE to LModE was perhaps not as obviously marked as that between ME and EModE, there were nevertheless a number of major changes, summed up on the first slide:

* **Greater standardisation of spelling, even in private letters**
* **The rise of ‘reference accents’ (Received Pronunciation, Scottish Standard English, General American)**
* **Continued expansion of vocabulary**
* **Emergence of present-day pronominal and modal systems (e.g. loss of *thou/ye* distinction, grammaticalization of *shall/will*)**
* **The rise of world Englishes (see next week)**

1.1 Underpinning all these developments were developments in the societal function of English; it was increasingly the case, during this period, that English became multifunctional. The change is indicated by two scientific works that frame the period; Isaac Newton’s *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687) was published in Latin to achieve an international audience, while Charles Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection* (1859) could do the same through the medium of English.

**The cult of correctness**

* **prescription, description**
* **‘standard (written/spoken) language’**
* **elaboration, selection, codification, acceptance**

1.2 English was thus becoming increasingly ‘dignified’, and one effect was that many writers felt it needed stabilising and tidying up – something that, of course, remains the case with many present-day self-styled arbiters of taste (the kind of folk who complain to the papers about ‘sloppy’ expression and ‘slang’). This ‘cult of correctness’ emphasised prescription rather than description, and assisted the drive to ‘standard’ forms of the language. Einar Haugen (1966) identified four stages in this process: elaboration of function, selection of a particular variety as the variety to be used as a model, codification through education, or through an ‘academy’ like the Academie francaise (founded 1635), and societal acceptance of the norms thus established. We will see the operation of these four stages throughout the ‘external’ history of English during the EModE-LModE period.

*2. Some representative discussions*

**[The First Part of the Elementarie 1582]**

2.0 We see statements about the importance of ‘tidying’ the vernacular from the sixteenth century onwards. Here is a typical statement from the early period, from the schoolmaster Richard Mulcaster (d.1611):

**IT must nedes be that our English tung hath matter enough in hir own writing, which maie direct her own right, if it be reduced to certain precept, and rule of Art, tho it haue not as yet bene thoroughlie perceaued (Mulcaster 1582).**

2.1 And here is another (**[Proposal, 1712]**): from Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), one of the great figures of Augustan culture, best-known these days for Gulliver’s Travels but one of the most prolific writers of his day. Swift, like many eighteenth-century savants, saw the need for English to be ‘tidied up’, in the same way that Cardinal Richelieu’s Academie was supposed to have done for French. He failed.

2.2 However, much more successful was this learned ecclesiastical gentleman, whom we met in my grammar lectures in L1A: **Robert Lowth (1710-1787)**. Bishop Lowth’s grammar was hugely influential in his time, and many of the ‘prescriptive rules’ we now try to observe in formal writing derive from his account. Here is the title-page:

**[Grammar]**

And here is a characteristic statement about what he saw as his goal:

**The principal design of a Grammar of any Language is to teach us to express ourselves with propriety in that Language, and to be able to judge of every phrase and form of construction, whether it be right or not (Lowth 1762: x).**

2.3 **Lowth 1762: 62:** and here is one of his characteristic ‘rules’. I was certainly taught this rule at school, and it is still taught in schools in Japan; I witnessed awareness of the rule there in a seminar I have in Tokyo to Japanese students a couple of years ago. But many of you will be completely baffled! (However, I’m always interested by how students attempt to ‘invent’ a rule, e.g. that *shall* is somehow more ‘formal’ than *will*.)

2.3 Another hugely influential figure was Samuel Johnson (1709-1784), whose other gifts – as a poet, a biographer, a critic, a novelist and even as a conversationalist (as recorded by his own biographer James Boswell) – were arguably overshadowed by his great achievement: **the Dictionary** of 1755. Here are some characteristic entries:

**[COMMENCE]**

**[OATS]**

2.4 Fascinatingly, though, the Dictionary actually failed – Johnson’s own confession – to be what he planned to do. Here is the Prospectus he issued beforehand in order to secure subscribers:

**[Plan]**

And here is what he said he was trying to do:

***The Plan* … (1747: 32)**

2.5 But when the Dictionary appeared a few years later, Johnson had grasped the facts about language change:

**When we see men grow old and die at a certain time one after another, from century to century, we laugh at the elixir that promises to prolong life to a thousand years; and with equal justice may the lexicographer be derided, who being able to produce no example of a nation that has preserved their words and phrases from mutability, shall imagine that his dictionary can embalm his language, and secure it from corruption and decay, that it is in his power to change sublunary nature, and clear the world at once from folly, vanity, and affectation. With this hope, however, academies have been instituted, to guard the avenues of their languages, to retain fugitives, and repulse intruders; but their vigilance and activity have hitherto been vain; sounds are too volatile and subtile for legal restraints; to enchain syllables, and to lash the wind, are equally the undertakings of pride, unwilling to measure its desires by its strength.**

2.6 And he went on to make a very valid point about explaining language change that later historical linguists have sometimes forgotten:

**Total and sudden transformations of a language seldom happen; conquests and migrations are now very rare: but there are other causes of change, which, though slow in their operation, and invisible in their progress, are perhaps as much superior to human resistance, as the revolutions of the sky, or intumescence of the tide. Commerce, however necessary, however lucrative, as it depraves the manners, corrupts the language; they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavour to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect, like the jargon which serves the traffickers on the *Mediterranean* and *Indian* coasts. This will not always be confined to the exchange, warehouse, or the port, but will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of people, and be at last incorporated with the current speech.**

**[Webster, Dissertations]**

2.7 Others were bolder in ‘planning’, generally with a political viewpoint – for language and ideology are close bedfellows. Here is the American lexicographer Noah Webster, in his Dissertations:

**The English would never copy our orthography for their own use; and consequently the same impressions of books would not answer for both countries. The inhabitants of the present generation would read the English impressions; but posterity, being taught a different spelling, would prefer the American orthography.**

**Besides this, a *national language* is a band of *national union*. Every engine should be employed to render the people of this country national; to call their attachments home to their own country; and to inspire them with the pride of national character.**

The effect was found in his own American **[Dictionary]**.

2.8 And ‘moral improvement’ has often been seen as something concerning the ‘language police’ of all centuries. Here is a widely printed work (we are going to encounter this publisher again in the second video):

**Daniel Fenning, *The Universal Spelling-Book* (1756)**

And here is what he thinks spelling should be about!

**… a great Help to prevent Youth from falling a Sacrifice to the common Temptations of Life, and their own unguarded Passions.**

[END OF VIDEO 1]

*3. Some texts from EModE to LModE*

3.0 In this second video-presentation I propose to illustrate the changes the language has undergone through a series of examples. My first set is Shakespearean.

Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar* (First Folio, 1623)

***Calp.* … Horsses do neigh, and dying men did grone,**

**And Ghosts did shrieke and squeale about the streets.**

**O *Caesar*, these things are beyond all vse,**

**And I do feare them.**

***Caes.* What can be auoyded**

**Whose end is purpos'd by the mighty Gods?**

**Yet *Caesar* shall go forth: for these Predictions**

**Are to the world in generall, as to *Caesar*.**

3.1 There are some distinctions in spelling here, and punctuation/italicisation is rather different from present-day usage. The grammar is – in comparison with Middle English – also more ‘modern’. But there are some obvious archaisms, such as the use of the *do*-auxiliary with positive statements (*do neigh*, *did grone* etc): a characteristic EModE usage that has now died out except when used emphatically. However: observe Caesar’s use of *shall*, with its sense of obligation: a prefiguration of Lowth’s statement we have seen in Video 1.

3.2 Prescriptive rules, therefore, change; and my next example demonstrates that fact. It is from one of the most famous speeches in *Julius Caesar*:

***Ant.* … The Noble *Brutus*,**

**Hath told you *Caesar* was Ambitious:**

**If it were so, it was a greeuous Fault,**

**And greeuously hath *Caesar* answer’d it.**

**Heere, vnder leaue of *Brutus*, and the rest**

**(For *Brutus* is an Honourable man**

**So are they all; all Honourable men)**

**Come I to speake in *Caesars* Funerall.**

**… Beare with me,   
My heart is in the Coffin there with *Caesar,*   
And I must pawse, till it come backe to me.   
1. Me thinkes there is much reason in his sayings.  
2. If thou consider rightly of the matter,   
*Caesar* ha's had great wrong.**

3.3 ‘1.’ and ‘2.’ in the First Folio are the First and Second Plebians. There are again many interesting things going on in this text, but I’d like to draw attention to *ha’s* in ‘2.’s’ speech. (Recall that the punctuation is that of the First Folio.) The apostrophe – a humanist innovation from the late fifteenth century – indicates an elision, something lacking: it is a marker of social difference. You might notice that Marc Antony, a patrician and thus a nobleman, uses *hath*. Has is usual in present-day English: we might recall Samuels Johnson:

… they that have frequent intercourse with strangers, to whom they endeavour to accommodate themselves, must in time learn a mingled dialect … [This] will be communicated by degrees to other ranks of people, and be at last incorporated with the current speech.

I can’t think of a better description of what modern linguists call *linguistic diffusion*.

3.4 Shakespeare – perhaps unsurprisingly – was deeply attuned to linguistic variation, and my last example demonstrates his abilities in that direction. It’s from *King Lear*:

***Stew*. Wherefore, bold Pezant,**

**Dar’st thou support a publish’d Traitor? Hence,**

**Least that th’infection of his fortune take**

**Like hold on thee. Let go his arme.**

***Edg.* Chill not let go Zir,**

**Without vurther ‘casion.**

***Stew.* Let go Slaue, or thou dy’st.**

***Edg.* Good Gentlemen goe your gate, and let poore volke passe: and ‘chud ha’bin zwaggerd out of my life,‘twould not ha’bin zo long as ‘tis, by a vortnight. Nay, come not neere th’old man: keepe out che vor’ye, or ice try whither your Costard, or my Ballow be the harde; chill be plaine with you.**

***Stew.* Out Dunghill.**

***Edg.* Chill picke your teeth Zir: come, no matter vor your foynes.**

3.5 Again, there are many interesting things going on in this passage. But notice in particular the ‘marked’ Kentish speech of Edgar, notably his use of <z, v> (presumably reflecting [z, v]): a feature of many Kentish accents until the middle of the twentieth century.

**Florence and Thomas Smyth, c.1627**

of Ashton Court, near Bristol. (This is probably a marriage-portrait painted for Florence’s parents. Thomas was later an MP , and a royalist during the civil wars of the seventeenth century, as was Florence’s father John Poulett. You’ll find details of all these people in ODNB.)

3.6 Yet at around the same time as the First Folio other usages were still to be found in private letters. Here is one you will be discussing further in the seminar. Here is Florence’s handwriting:

**[facsimile]**

And here is the text:

**Deere Tom**

**I am glad to heare thou art well and that thou likes so well of my aduice as to falo it I hope it will not be the wors for ethar of us if it ware I showld be ueri sori since it was my desire but I trust in god we shall do well enufgh/**

**all maters heare are well past though it were my hard fortune to stand for a god mother for want of abeter and so one might sare to se how litel they estemed me I was no wis ambitious of the place had not my father spoken to me I think the child had had but halfe her baptism**

**I must now bid the godnight for I sat up long at cards last night with my pa the Barnit and Mtr Bluet that I can scare se yet If thou wart in the bed I should kepe my eyes open I still looke for the this day senight acording to your promies**

**thine Flo Smyth**

**Hinton this Ash wensday**

3.7 Spelling in private letters is clearly still fairly flexible (note Florence’s spelling of ‘enough’, for instance), as is punctuation, and I guess that makes sense in a private situation; if you and I agree that *enufgh* is the correct spelling for ‘enough’ then that works for us both. As yet educational norms – especially for women – have not yet been enforced.

3.8 But norms can change, as demonstrated in my next example.

**[RBS banknote]**

This famous portrait of the founder of the RBS flags an important man: the ‘uncrowned king of Scotland’ in the early eighteenth century, Ilay was a wealthy and powerful man, a member of the elite of his period. Here however is one of his letters (my transcription):

**A letter from Lord Ilay to the Duke of Newcastle (1733)**

**My Lord I did my self the honour to write to Your Grace soon after I came here, & Mr Delafaye has since informed me that Your Grace was then in Sussex. The Politick War here goes on, & every body is busie on one side or other. I dont yet find that the Opposers have gained ground farther than to raise the demands of several people I must deal with, this I always foresaw as A necessary consequence of such an Opposition, & is an evil I fear must be Yeilded to, especially since there is good reason to hope that it may be kept within tolerable bounds; there is nothing encreases it more than some in the Kings Service refusing to declare for the King’s measures; L*or*d Haddington expressly to my face refused to declare either as to the ensuing session of Parliament, or the Election next Year, & My L*or*d Rothes has industriously avoided the conversing with me on any bussiness, this seems somewhat hard when I consider that these two Lords enjoy favours from his Majesties great goodness, which would give the Court four, if not five Votes in the Elections, …**

Phew – what a sentence! Fashions in sentences have evidently changed.

3.9 Part of the change was no doubt encouraged by the appearance of guidebooks like this one:

**[Compleat Letter Writer]**

Texts such as CLW align with the appearance of the ‘epistolary novel’:

**At the Place of Execution, the Scene grew still more shocking; and the Clergyman who attended was more the Subject of Ridicule, than their serious Attention. The Psalm was sung amidst the Curses and Quarrelling of hundreds of the most abandon’d and profligate of Mankind: Upon whom (so stupid are they to any Sense of Decency) all the Preparation of the unhappy Wretches seems to serve only for the Subject of a barbarous Kind of Mirth, altogether inconsistent with Humanity. And as soon as the poor Creatures were half-dead, I was much surprized, before such a Number of Peace-Officers, to see the Populace fall to haling and pulling the Carcasses with so much Earnestness, as to occasion several warm Rencounters, and broken Heads. These, I was told, were the Friends of the Persons executed, or such as, for the Sake of Tumult, chose to appear so, and some Persons sent by private Surgeons to obtain Bodies for Dissection. The Contests between these were fierce and bloody, and frightful to look at: So that I made the best of my Way out of the Croud, and, with some Difficulty, rode back among a large Number of People, who had been upon the same Errand as myself. The Face of every one spoke a kind of Mirth, as if the Spectacle they had beheld, had afforded Pleasure instead of Pain, which I am wholly unable to account for . .....**

3.10 The effects of such guidebooks, and even more of mass education emerging in the later nineteenth century, meant that epistolary culture was extended to all classes of society. By the beginning of the twentieth century, things have become democratised. Here is a letter from a fairly humble fellow, writing to his fiancée during WWI, now stored in the Imperial War Museum:

**From Private David Sweeney (2nd Battalion, Lincolnshire Regt) to his fiancée Ivy (1916)**

**Well my Darling we are now out of hearing of the Guns as we have had a 26 mile Train Ride, but I dont think it will be long befor we are into them again, but at present we are not strong enough. I told you Dear I was happy Well so I am, but when I think of My Poor Dear Old Chums who have fallen I could Cry I had to cry in the Trench about one of my Chums Poor Old Jack Nokes he has been out hear Since the Verry bigginning of the War and has not received a scratch he has never been home on Leave because he has had a small Crime his home is at Wimbleton Poor Lad he died Game with his Mother’s Name his last Word. I cryed like a Child, not only him but a lot more of my poor comrades have gone. Ivy my Darling I am sure it is You and My Poor Sister Praying for me that God has spared me. I said my Prayers at lease 1000 times a Day (Please God Spare me to get out of this War safely for my dear Ivy’s and my Sisters Sake). O Ivy I cannot tell you the Horrors of this War, you cannot Realise what it is like to see Poor Lads Lying about with such terrible Wounds and we cannot help them.**

3.11 I’m going to conclude this video by returning to published work, and the representation of linguistic variation, in Charles Dickens’s *Pickwick Papers* from 1836-7. More about such matters such week! My first example is the representation of a ‘new’ democracy; well, it’s no very democratic by modern standards (no female voters, very restricted franchise), but the Parliamentary Reform act of 1832 was the first step, and Dickens is catching the backwash here. A parliamentary candidate is quizzing his electoral agent.

**From Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7): the Eatanswill election**

**'Is everything ready?' said Samuel Slumkey to Mr. Perker.**

**'Nothing has been left undone, my dear sir. There are twenty washed men at the street door for you to shake hands with; and six children in arms that you're to pat on the head, and ask the age of. Be particular about the children, my dear sir. It always has a great effect, that sort of thing.**

**'And perhaps if you *could* manage to kiss one of 'em, it would produce a very great impression on the crowd. I think it would make you very popular.'**

**[Sam Weller image]**

3.12 And here is one of the most important figures in the Papers, much focused-on in Victorian prints: Sam Weller, the cockney servant. Notice the attempt, in the manner of contemporary drama, of showing changes in speech -direction through the use of the dash or em-rule’. Unlike Edgar, who is an aristocrat in disguise, and Plebian 2, who has a marginal role, Weller is clearly at centre-stage. Notice (e.g.) the v/w alternation reflecting one feature of ‘stage-Cockney

**From Dickens' *Pickwick Papers* (1836-7): introducing Sam Weller**

**‘Do! You, Sir! That ain’t the worst on it, neither. They puts things into old gen’l’m’n’s heads as they never dreamed of. My father, Sir, wos a coachman. A widower he wos, and fat enough for anything—uncommon fat, to be sure. His missus dies, and leaves him four hundred pound. Down he goes to the Commons, to see the lawyer and draw the blunt—very smart—top boots on—nosegay in his button–hole—broad–brimmed tile—green shawl—quite the gen’l’m’n.**

**Goes through the archvay, thinking how he should inwest the money—up comes the touter, touches his hat—“Licence, Sir, licence?”—“What’s that?” says my father.—“Licence, Sir,” says he.—“What licence?” says my father.—“Marriage licence,” says the touter.—“Dash my veskit,” says my father, “I never thought o’ that.”—“I think you wants one, Sir,” says the touter. My father pulls up, and thinks a bit—“No,” says he, “damme, I’m too old, b’sides, I’m a many sizes too large,” says he.—“Not a bit on it, Sir,” says the touter.—“Think not?” says my father.—“I’m sure not,” says he; “we married a gen’l’m’n twice your size, last Monday.”’**

FOLLOW-UP:

* **(1) the Introduction to *A Modern English Reader*, available on the Level 1B Moodle site; and**
* **(2) the Texts in the seminar booklet (you may find them easier to understand if you read them aloud).**

[END OF VIDEO 2]