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The shifts from middle to modern are very drastic to the point where old English looks like a completely different language. Social factors, different groups of people, and time all contribute to the slow and drastic change of this language. Some of the contributors to this change have to do with spelling, pronunciation, morphology and syntax.

When it comes to spelling, new symbols were introduced such as *g*, *z*, and the digraph *th* (Barber 162). Another example in change of spelling is the use of *y*. It went from being a “front rounded” word to just another replacement for the letter *l* ; for example, the word *kyng* to King or *fyre* to fire (Barber 163). This change in spelling had a lot to do with re reading old text and scribes misunderstanding of what the letters happened to be. It was hard to determine letters like *m*, *n*, *u*, *un*, *uu*, and *um* so as a result, spellings changed (Barber 163).

The changes in pronunciation in the Middle English period are also significant to notice apart from the spelling changes. “The Great Vowel Shift” occurred in the year c1400 towards the end of long *e* in “sheep” which sounded more like the word “shape” having a sound more like *ay* rather than *ee* (Cable). It was at this point in time where they decided they needed to reform English spellings with a new alphabet. In 1569, John Hart made a new phonetic alphabet to fix what he called the “fatal flaw in our system of language”(Cable). It is with this alphabet combined with other language reformer’s contributions that gives us evidence for the pronunciation of English at the time he lived (Cable).

Because of the mixing of Old English and Old Norse as well as other reasons, the inflections in Middle English were very much reduced. It is referred to as the period of

“weakened inflections” (Barber 167). Another reason for this was because the English and Scandinavian words were very similar and got confused between certain endings resulting in them using other types of grammatical devices. (Barber 167). One example is the endings –an, -on, -un, and –um all becoming –en then later becoming simple –e. (Barber 167). By the end of the 1400 the –e was dropped all together. Since inflections changed so did the syntax. The syntax became the S-V-O word order, which is still what we use now.

There have been so many changes in the English language from Old to Middle to Modern English. The Norman conquest was responsible for contributing to this change but it still took a while for it to fully shift from old to middle English. Through changes in spelling, pronunciation, morphology and syntax we can clearly see how the language changed in the Middle English period.

Works Cited

Barber, Charles, *The English Language: A Historical Introduction*. Cambridge University Press 2009.

Thomas Cable, *A History of the English Language* [PE 1075 .B3])