

## EMERGENCE OF MODERN ENGLISH: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE CHANGE

*Ebi Yeibo, Ph.D*

### Abstract

*It is an established fact in linguistic circles that language is an inherently and continually changing entity over time and that the instruments, pace or scope of the changes may not be identical in all contexts. With modern English as the main illustrative focus, the study highlights the socio-cultural causes and complexion of the historical and contemporary changes the English language has undergone in the three periods of its history (i.e. Old, Middle and Modern English) across all levels of language study viz: orthography, lexis, morphology, semantics, phonology, syntax, etc, in order to demonstrate this linguistic fact. M.A.K. Halliday's Functional theory and the Substratum theory of language change are used for the study, against the backdrop that they jointly account for changes in all definitive aspects of language that are triggered or precipitated by contact through invasion, annexation, colonization, trade, immigration or travels, etc. The study affirms that the perceptible or fundamental changes a language undergoes are mere historical milestones since at every point of its developmental trajectory the English language has effectively performed its basic functions of creativity and communication; and that the process or phenomenon of change in a language is a natural and practically inevitable continuum.*

Change, no doubt, is an all-encompassing phenomenon; languages generally show a significant dose of it. Millar (2007:1) highlights this fact in his view that “one of the fundamental things you need to understand about languages is that they are always changing.” The English language, in particular, is a glowing exemplification of the potential dynamism of man’s most expressive attribute over time. In other words, a close study of the history of the English language points to the fact that the language has, indeed, come a long way, in the sense that, in its evolutionary process, there has been a lot of far-reaching and significant changes. Millar (2007:1) affirms this fact inter alia:

*...whether we are aware of it or not, English is changing all the time.  
New words are constantly coming into use, and not only new words, but  
also new pronunciations and grammatical forms. At the same time, old  
words, old forms and pronunciations are gradually dropping out of use.*

Significantly, this situation precipitated the categorization of the language into three distinct periods viz: Old English (449-1100); Middle English (1150-1500) and Modern English (1500). It is also noteworthy that, all the changes in the English language, which are products of sundry internal and external variables, have taken place within a permanent framework. This is only natural as Ogu (1992) makes us to understand that the history of language is generally a progression of change within a permanent entity. This fact makes it worthwhile to study the history of language, to ascertain the significant developmental stages, coupled with the fact that, as Baugh (1951:1) declares, “... an

interest in his past (is) one of the distinguishing characteristics of man as compared with the other animals.” According to this scholar (ibid),

*....in these days when the cultivated man or woman is conscious of deficiencies in his education without some knowledge of economics, medieval history, recent advances in the basic natural sciences, so also he may discover a desire to know something of the nature and development of his mother tongue. The medium by which he communicates his thought and feelings to his fellow men, the tool with which he conducts his business or the government of millions of people, the vehicle by which have been transmitted to him the science, the philosophy, the poetry of the race is surely worthy of study.*

This Scholar (Ibid) further argues that, though we should not expect every educated person to be a philologist or linguist,

*...it is reasonable to assume that the liberally educated man should know something of the structure of his language, its position in the world and its relation to other tongues, the wealth of its vocabulary together with the sources from which that vocabulary has been and is being enriched, and in general the great political, social, and cultural influences which have combined to make his language what it is.*

The main thrust of this study, therefore, is on the concept of language change, with an illustrative focus on the modern English period. However, the study is both synchronic (i.e. looking at language as a ‘state’ at a particular moment in time) and diachronic (i.e. showing language as a continually changing entity), in the sense that, it focuses on the concept of language change and the historical journey the English language has made so far, by taking a cursory look at the evolution or preliminary stages of the language through a comparative study of the first two periods before zeroing in holistically on Modern English. This would equip us with relevant background insight on the character and pervasive value of language change as a linguistic concept and also show the complexion of the English language before the advent or emergence of the modern period. The former is particularly necessary because, as Crystal (1987) contends, before we can say how a language has changed from state X to state Y, we need to know something about X and Y.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Many scholars have propounded various theories to account for language change and guide its study. These include the conscious and unconscious theory, Natural vs Social, Random fluctuation, the S-curve and Wave theories. However, for purposes of plausibility and suitability, we adopted M.A.K. Halliday’s Functional theory, and the Substratum theory of language change. The former covers the invention of new words, slangs, technological words, etc, as an inevitable necessity, to cater for new products, discoveries technological inventions and intellectual disciplines. The view of this theory is that languages change, particularly in terms of vocabulary, because they must adapt to new functional realities in all spheres of human existence. In other words, new words or labels are created or coined in languages to meet the needs of their users. Significantly, this theory also accounts for the words of

language that have become extinct or obsolete because they are no longer needed or required to perform the primary function of communication. On the other hand, the latter theory (i.e. substratum) serves to fill the overt gap or shortcoming of the functionalist theory which reflects or covers only lexical change. This theory of language change explains changes in all aspects of a language (i.e. Morphology, lexis, semantics, syntax, phonology, etc) which are triggered or precipitated by contact through trade, invasion, social media or networking and immigration or travels. Importantly, all these are areas covered by the present study. The theory is particularly relevant for the various invasions in the history of the English Language, specifically in the Old and Middle English periods which had a far-reaching and abiding influence on the nature and direction of the language; and the world-wide travels and contacts the language has made, particularly, in its imperial history, all of which brought about different forms of adaptation, accretion, modification and deviant realization of the language in the new lands.

### **The Concept of Language Change**

Basically, language change denotes how a given language undergoes significant changes at the levels of language study (i.e. lexis, syntax, semantics, phonology, etc), over a given period of time.

It is usually systematic but perceptible or palpable and traverses all levels or aspects of language use. McGregor (2009:278) observes that “any aspect of a language can change over time: phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, pragmatics, and lexicon.” According to the scholar (2009:276),

Language changes are ubiquitous; with the exception of extinct languages; no language remains static over a long period of time. You are probably aware of changes that have occurred in your own language within your lifetime: new words that have come into use, and others that have gone out of use, or at least out of fashion. You are probably also aware of differences between the speech of your generation and that of your parents’ and grandparents’ generations.

Millar (2007:xi) draws our attention to the fact that historical linguistics “deals with the study of the histories and prehistories of languages, with the discovery of ancient connections between languages, and with the study of language change.” Akmajian (2001:315) adds that,

Language change is one of the subjects of historical linguistics, the subfield of linguistics that studies languages in its historical aspects. Sometimes the term diachronic linguistics is used instead of historical linguistics, as a way of referring to the story of a language (or languages) at various points in time and at various historical stages. Diachronic is often used in contrast to synchronic, a term referring to the study of a language (or languages) at a single point in time, without reference to earlier (or later) stages.

The fact is that, whether it is “individual” or “community” change (Akmajian, et al, 2001), Yule (1985) observes that the concept of language change focuses on the historical development of languages and attempts to characterize the regular processes which are involved. To illustrate the various changes that the English language has undergone over time, McGregor (2009:276/277) compares three versions of the ‘Lord’s Prayer’, representing the different periods in English: old, Middle and Modern English, respectively:

(12-1) *Fæder ure þu beart on heofonum; Si þinnam age halgod to  
becume þin rice gewurþe ðin illa on eorðan waswa on  
heofonum. Urnegedæghwamlican half ustodæg and for-gyf*

*usuregyltasswasswa we foryfaðurumgyltendum and ne  
gelædþu us on costnunge ac alys us of yfelesoplice.*

Old English, 11<sup>th</sup> Century

*(12-2) Ourefadirþat art in heueneshalwid be þi name: þireume or  
kingdom come to be. Bepiwille don in herþe as it is down in heuene.  
Yeue to us today oureeche days bred. And fory- eue to us ouredettis  
þat is ouresynnys as we foryeven to ouredettourisþat is to men þat  
hansynned in us. And led us not into temptacion but delyuere us from  
euyi.*

Middle English, Wycliffe, dated 1384

*(12-3) Our father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. thy kingdom  
come: thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our  
daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive themthat trespass  
against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. Amen.*

Early Modern English, from Book of Common Prayer 1559

In terms of the vocabulary and grammar, it is clear that the earlier versions of the language, particularly the old English, as highlighted above, are quite difficult to read or comprehend. As McGrejour (ibid) rightly observes, “languages change much more quickly, so that they are usually recognizably different within a few centuries, and certainly over a period of a millennium.” According to this scholar (ibid), “... to speak old English, a speaker of Modern English would need to learn it just as they would Spanish or Finnish.” Baugh (1951:62/63) corroborates this viewpoint inter alia:

*The English language has undergone such change in the course of  
time that one cannot read OldEnglish without special study. In fact  
a page of old English is likely at first to present a look of greater  
strangeness than a page of French or Italian because of the employment  
of certain characters that no longer form a part of our alphabet. In  
general, the differences which one notices between old and modern  
English concern spelling and pronunciation, the vocabulary, and the  
grammar.*

Another key issue in any discussion on language change is the causative factors. Though Akmajian, et al (2001:315) observe that linguists have little understanding of the exact causes of language change, they are convinced that:

*The inherent flexibility of human language, alongwith its  
complexity and the creativity with which it is used, cause it  
to be extremely variable and to change over time.*

Mcgregor (2009:289-294) suggests factors which precipitate language change to include: physiological tendencies, identity issues, foreign influence, taboo words, social upheaval, regularization needs, structural pressure, etc. In Reid's (2003) view, the size of the speech community in question can also determine the magnitude of change, as the languages of small speech communities could change faster. Mcgregor (2009: 289) adds that "in some cases a change is likely to be motivated by a combination of factors rather than just a single factor." A significant fact in this regard is that, as Mcgregor (Ibid) points out,

*Changes over time are generally considered to emerge from variation that existed in earlier varieties of the language, prior to the changes. This synchronic variation serves as it were as fuel for diachronic changes, which did not happen instantaneously.*

The overt implication of this statement is that there is a nexus between dialectal variation and the changes that occur in a language over time; that variations in dialects of Old English (i.e. Northumbrian, Mercian, Kentish, West Saxon); and MiddleEnglish (i.e. North, South, East Midland and West Midland), for instance, could have served as the basis or springboard for subsequent temporal changes in the language. Finegan (2004:448) graphically corroborates this viewpoint inter alia:

*One result of ongoing language changes is that a single language can develop into several languages. The early stages of such development are apparent in differences among Australian, American, Canadian, Indian, and English dialects all of which have sprung from the English spoken in Britain...*

This scholar (Ibid) adds that, in order for different dialects to develop into separate languages, groups of speakers must remain relatively isolated from one another, separated by physical barriers such as impassable mountains and great bodies of water or by social and political barriers such as those drawn along tribal, religious, racial, or national boundaries.

Another critical aspect of the concept of language change is the speed at which a specific language may change across the various levels. Mcgregor (2009:277) observes that,

*It is impossible to give a figure: the rate of change varies considerably; languages sometimes change rapidly sometimes slowly.... It also depends on what aspect of the language you are considering. Some parts of languages tend to be more resistant to change than others: for example some lexical items are more susceptible to change than others; pronouns tend to change rather slowly compared with the average lexical items; and bound morphemes tend to change more slowly than free morphemes.*

However, Finegan (2004:446) is rather more specific and assertive, stating that though language change is pervasive in the sense that it affects all levels of languages, it is most pronounced in the vocabulary:

*It's no secret that languages change over the years. They may change dramatically, especially in times of social or political upheavals. Although*

*usually the changes are subtle, all of us can recognize differences between the speech patterns of our parents and or friends and of our grandparents and their friends. Usually the most noticeable differences between generations are in the vocabulary.*  
(emphasis mine)

Another fundamental fact is that, to be able to progressively locate or identify changes in a given language, one should have a substantial idea of what the original looked like. This explains why historical linguists consider the concept of “family trees” and “proto-forms” germane to the historical study of languages. While the former helps the scholar to trace a group of languages to a common ancestor, the latter enables him to know the form of a language, or languages, before written history. The concept of “family trees” is particularly relevant to any discourse on the historical development of the English language because, as Yule (1985) observes, it incorporates the notion that this was the original form (proto) of language which was the source of modern languages in the Indian sub-continent (Indo), and in Europe (European) and that, with proto-Indo-European established as the ‘great-grandmother’, scholars set out to trace the branches of her family tree, showing the lineage of many modern languages.

This scholar (Ibid) contends that there are about thirty language families catering for the more than 4,000 languages in the world.

#### **A Comparative Study of Old and Middle English Periods**

As we have earlier stated, it is pertinent to outline the nature of the English language in the first two periods of its development because this would serve as the template to determine how far the language has gone in the modern English period, in terms of perceptible developmental changes. Significantly, the history of Old and Middle English periods is replete with invasions. While the Roman, the Anglo-Saxon and Danish invasions characterized the old English period, the Norman, invasion of 1066 marked another turning point in the development of the language and its literature. This signposts the Middle English period. Ogu (1992) affirms that the linguistic influence of the Norman occupation was decisive in forming a new English language and literature. Baugh (1951:189) also observes that,

*The Middle English period (1150-1500) was marked by momentous changes in the English language, changes more extensive and fundamental than those that have taken place at any time before or since. Some of them were the result of the Norman Conquest and the conditions which followed in the wake of that event. Others were a continuation of tendencies that had begun to manifest themselves in old English. These would have gone on even without the conquest, but took place more rapidly because the Norman invasion removed from English those conservative influences that are always felt when a language is extensively used in books and is spoken by an influential educated class.*

In Vocabulary, middle English witnessed the greatest influx of French words (Brook, 1958). Baugh (1951:189) observes that this period witnessed the "...loss of a large part of the Old English word – stock and the addition of thousands of words from French and Latin." In all spheres of life, French words became prominent in the English language. Baugh (1951:200) corroborates:

*Where two languages exist side by side for a long time and the relations between the people speaking them are as intimate as they were in England, considerable transference of words from one language to the other is inevitable. As is generally the case, the inter change was to some extent mutual. A good many English words found their way into the French spoken in England. We are naturally less interested in them, since they concern rather the history of the Anglo-Norman language. Their number was not so large as that of the French words introduced into English. English, representing an inferior culture, had more to learn from French, and there were other factors involved. The number of French words that poured into English was unbelievably great. There is nothing comparable to it in the previous or subsequent history of the language.*

The significant fact is that, in all spheres of life, French words were prominent, as the two languages lived side by side.

For illustration, living animals took on French names when prepared for the table:

<b>English</b>	<b>French</b>
Ox	Beef
Calf	Veal
Sheep	Mutton
Swine	Pork
Deer	Bacon

In regard to Orthography, middle English preserved the spelling patterns of the English language to a large extent, with noticeable changes in the following:

<b>O.E.</b>	<b>Mid. E</b>
Craeft	(a) Craft
Flaed	Glad
(a) ban	(o) bon

Ham

Hom.

At the level of phonology, the formation of new diphthongs is significant in Middle English:

**O.E**

**Middle English**

Megden

Meiden

The weakening of unaccented vowels a,o,u in old English, to e in middle English is also noticeable i.e.

**O.E**

**Middle English**

Stana

Stone

Sanu

Sone (son)

Short vowels became /a/, and /y / was unrounded to /I/ as in;

**O.E**

**Middle English**

Craeft

Craft

Bycy

Brigge

The other short vowels remained: a, e, I, o,u,:

**O.E**

**Middle English**

Cattle

Cattle

Bedd

Bed

Scip

Schip/sheep

Full

ful

The long /y/ developed in the same way as the short /y/ (that is, unrounded to /I/):

**Old**

**Middle**

**Modern**

Bryd

Bride

Bride



### **The Emergence of Modern English**

As we have earlier noted, linguists believe that language is in a progressive process of change from one generation to another. Significantly, the instrument(s) or magnitude of such change may not be identical. This explains the difference between the evolution of the first two periods English and modern English. While the former were engendered by successive military invasions, the latter is the corollary of an interplay of various social and scientific variables. These range from the rapid spread of Education to increased communication and the use of more varied and scientific means of communication. Baugh (1951: 198) explains this phenomenon:

*In the development of languages, particular events often have recognizable and at times, far-reaching effects.... But there are also more general conditions which come into being and are no less influential. In the modern English period,.... certain of these new conditions came into play, conditions which previously either had not existed at all or were present in only a limited way, and they caused English to develop along somewhat different lines from those that had characterized its history in the middle ages.*

Francis (1963: 16) summarized the conditions as follows:

- i. The continued growth of the language in the versatility, variety and wealth of its vocabulary as it became the vehicle for one of the richest and most extensive literatures in the world.
- ii. The new scientific and technological developments of the modern age.
- iii. The spread of the language into many parts of the world and its pre-eminent position and influence.

Ogu (1992) categorized them into two: the conservative and the radical. According to the scholar, the conservative influence tended toward printing and education while the radical was brought about by travel, commerce and trade.

### **Phases of Modern English and their Distinct Characteristics**

The modern English period, which commenced from 1500, encompasses different phases, which have their own distinct characteristics. The following discourse highlights the central issues or distinguishing features of this period.

#### **The Renaissance Period**

This period in general history spans the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1500-1650) and is replete with intellectual activism. Significantly, it marks the early modern English period which witnessed serious efforts by scholars to ‘‘dignify and stabilize’’ the language. Many books were written to reflect the new aggregate views on the orthography, vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation. The problem of Orthography was a matter of utmost concern in the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Baugh (1951) explains that the trouble

was not merely that English spelling was bad but that there was no generally accepted system that everyone could conform to in the sense that it was neither phonetic nor fixed.

There was so much variety and inconsistency that some writers referred to it as chaotic. This was further compounded when Normanscribes wrote English with French habits during the Norman invasion of the middle age. So many scholars wrote to amend and improve the Orthography. The most important and extensive work, however, is Richard Mukaster's *Elementrie*(1582). This scholar argued that it was difficult to make English entirely phonetic. He anchored this argument on the premise that if the same word could be used in difference senses, it was inevitable that the same letter could mean different sounds. He also removed superfluous letters such as:

Putt	-	put
Ledd	-	led
`Grabb	-	grab

And retained such silent letters as the 't' in 'scratch' and in "fetch". This scholar is also reputed to have completed the first dictionary on orthographical principle. He compiled approximately 7,000 words to standardize spelling. These were preserved by printing which was introduced by William Caxton in 1476.

**Vocabulary:** The vocabulary of English also increased in wealth and variety during this period. Wide accretions in form of loan words were made to it. Words were freely incorporated into the language from Latin, Greek and French roots. Hence McCrum (2002) quotes Emerson that the English language is the sea which receives tributaries from every region under heaven. The following are examples:

<b>English Word</b>	<b>Root</b>
Autography	(Greek) oaUto = self + graphein = to write
Chronology	(Greek) Cronos = time + logos = words, narrative
Dexterity	(Latin) Dexterio = on or pertaining to the right

We have the following words from Spanish and Portuguese sources:

1. Endure (Latin) induare = to harden
2. Erudite (Latin) erudire = to free from rudeness
3. Paradox (Greek) para = contrary to dox = opinion

Writers like Shakespeare and Spenser re-introduced old words or coined new ones of English sound in their writings: bevy, freak, mickle, glance, birthright, gloomy, endear, delve, etc. Significantly, the vocabulary of English became so enriched through the various variables introduced above. This suggested the need for "complete" dictionaries, a task which was accomplished by Bailey and Samuel Johnson in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Pronunciation:** Baugh (1951:63) notes that,

*...the pronunciation of old English words commonly differs somewhat from that of their modern equivalents. The long vowels in particular have undergone considerable modification. Thus the old English word *stān* is the same word as modern English *stone*, but the vowel is different. A similar correspondence is apparent in *hālig*-holy, *gān*, *bān*-bone, *rāp*-rope, *hlāf*- loaf, *bāt*, boat. Other vowels have likewise undergone changes in *fōt* (foot), *cēne* (keen), *metan* (mete), *fīr* (fire), *riht* (right), *hū* (how), *hlūd* (loud), but the identity of these words with their modern descendants is still readily apparent.*

Other significant changes in pronunciation during this period include:

- i. Middle English /a/ had become /æ/ in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (cat, mat, back, thank).
- ii. Middle English /u/ became unrounded from u in full, pull to u as in cut, but, sun.
- iv. In the long vowel, a noteworthy change known as the “Great Vowel Shift” took place. All the long vowels are pronounced with a greater elevation of the tongue and closing of the mouth. In this process, those which could not be raised became diphthongs i.e. /i/ became /ai/ and /u/ became /au/. Below are a few other examples:

Middle English	Modern English
/a/ as in father	/a/ as in name, face
/O/ open as in lord	/O/ as in cold, goat

In the area of grammar, a few new developments took place:

1. The S plural had become general.
2. The weak plural N (even, shoon, kine) in middle English survived in present day oxen, children, brethren.
3. An unchanged plural in cattle, sheep, swine, etc, also survived from middle English.
4. The genitive of middle English evolved into modern possessive. For instance, in old English, authors wrote:  
“The king his servants”.  
In the modern possessive, we have:  
“The King’s servants”
5. Shakespeare and others wrote “unkindest”, “more larger”.  
All these changed in the comparative and superlative senses of modern English i.e. we now have: larger, kindest, etc.
6. The pronouns, thou, ye, thee, etc, fell into disuse except in poetry. You’ was substituted for “ye” nominative. ‘Its’ became the possessive of ‘it’.
7. The pronoun ‘who’ as a relative pronoun development in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.
8. The verb developed wider use of auxiliaries:

Old English	Modern English
Goes he out?	Does he go out?
What makes you?	What are you making?

It is also imperative to note in terms of grammar that a big contrast between Modern English and Old English is that, while the former is analytic, the latter was synthetic. An analytic language uses auxiliaries, prepositions, verbs and word order to show relationships (i.e. syntax plays a strategic role in meaning making in Modern English) while a synthetic language depends on inflections. According to Baugh (1951:63/64), in the case of Indo-European Languages, inflections appear on the end of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and verbs. This scholar (ibid) observes that,

*In Modern English, however, the subject and the object do not have distinctive forms, nor do we have, except in the possessive case, inflectional endings to indicate the other relations marked by case endings in Latin. Instead, we make use of a fixed order of words. It makes a great deal of difference in English whether we say **Nero killed Agrippina** or **Agrippina Killed Nero**.*

It is also pertinent to point out that the progressive loss of inflections in English actually started from Middle English. Hence while Old English had ‘full’ inflections, Middle English had ‘levelled’ inflections and Modern English has ‘lost’ inflections (see Baugh 1951:59).

### **The English Language of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century**

Like the renaissance period, the 13<sup>th</sup> century also witnessed significant amendments or changes to the English language. The period is particularly important for its high rational tendencies and puristic attitude. The major ideal was to raise a standard and prescriptive language. Ogu (1992) captures the exact feeling in his observation that the 18<sup>th</sup> century grammarian was of the illusion that the continual lack of strict, hard and fast rules would eventually lead to the disintegration of the language. In fact, the age wrongly assumed that language was static and, therefore, needed to be brought to a state of perfection. In this puristic spirit, the following changes were notable:

1. The use of ‘slang’ was discouraged.
2. Colloquialism was objected to. For instance, Jonathan Swift in 1710 (Tatler, 230) raised serious objections to colloquial clippings such as: I’d, can’t, he’s shan’t and the use of only the first syllables(s) to represent a word (i.e. rep. for representative; plenipo for plenipotentiary).
3. What was regarded as ‘pleonastic’ words were also rejected. Examples include: nowadays, downfall, furthermore, wherewith, selfsame. (Please note that these have become acceptable and legitimate usages in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.)
4. Increased travels, new ideas and techniques, new branches of scientific investigation, etc made important additions to the vocabulary. For instance, the result of travels can be seen in these words:

From the orient and western Hemisphere      From W/A (through the Spanish & Portuguese)

Bangle, bungalow, thug, loot, barbecue cocoon, maize, chocolate, tomato, barracuda      Banana, yam, voodoo, gorilla, palaver, jazz.

### **English in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries**

The unending search for new ideas and techniques in these centuries impacted tremendously on the vocabulary of the language. In medicine and the sciences, for instance, new discoveries were made. It is incumbent upon the language to devise specialized words (registers) to express them. The following are notable examples:

Medicine	Chemistry	Psychology	Cinema and Automobile
Hormone,	Atom, alkali	Extrovert,	Clutch,
Enzyme,	Titration,	Plex, introvert,	Projector, Film,
Penicillin,	Molecule	Frustration	Priston, fade
Endocrine,			Out, spark
Aspirin,			Plug, throttle,
Metabolism			Windshield

**Formation of Compound Words:** This practice which survived since the old English period was retained i.e. ness (goodness), ship (friendship), -ish (selfish), -ly (miserly). The Greeks and Romans also added their own pattern of compound word formation. For instance: ant appears in militant, recalcitrant, concomitant. The Greeks also supplied prefixes and suffixes: meta (metabolism), hypo (hypocrite), hyper (hyperinflation), mania (kleptomania)

At the grammatical or structural level, significant changes occurred in the uses of the verb.

- i. **Phrasal Verbs:** The verb developed the ability to combine with other words, to express difficult or divergent shades of meaning. Examples are:

<b>Phrasal Verb</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Get on	Progress
Get away	Escape
Make out	Decipher

Turn up

Appear

**Noun as verbs:** In modern English, nouns can function as verbs. Examples are:

Nouns	Functioning as verbs
Author	To author a book
Date	To date someone
Chair	To chair a meeting
position	To position someone

iii. **Forming other parts of speech:** Modern English verbs can also join other words to form other parts of speech:

Nouns so produced	Meaning
A break-down	Collapse of a machine
A write-up	A report
A take-over	Merging of two companies

### Varieties of Modern English

The English language, as it is spoken today, is by no means homogenous. When a language is taken from its roots to different and distant locations, there is the tendency for it to adjust to socio-cultural and linguistic milieu of its new land. Brook (1958:203) corroborates this view when he avers that, "in the history of languages, divergent developments result from geographical divisions". Lubega (1988:54) echoes a similar viewpoint inter alia:

*Today, the English language is used in all corners of the Globe in linguistically and culturally diverse communities where it serves a wide range of functions.... In most third world countries, especially Asia and Africa, it is a vestige of some form of British political, cultural, educational and linguistic colonialism.... It has been adopted by different communities and it has, to a large extent, adapted itself to its new cultural and socio-linguistic environment.*

The critical point is that many varieties exist in the language due to the effect of the native language and cultures in the countries which use English. The popularity and overwhelming influence and significance of the English language in contemporary world affairs is majorly as a result of the expansive nature of its imperial history and the strategic importance of the United States of America in global politics, technology, sports, economy, etc. In other words, modern day English is a world language. The implication of this is discernible in the various varieties due to disparities in geo-political and socio-cultural locations such as British English, Canadian English, Australian English

and perhaps, Nigerian English, etc. For illustration, let us take an overview of the American variety, in contrast with the standard British variety in terms of vocabulary, orthography, syntax, semantics and pronunciation.

i. **Vocabulary:** There is a notable difference of vocabulary:

American	British
Sidewalk	Pavement
Elevator	Lift
fag	cigarette

ii. **Orthography:** The difference is marginal:

American	British
Honor	Honour
Traveler	Traveller
program	Programme

iii. **Syntax:** G.L. Book (1958) observes that in sentences containing an adverb and an auxiliary verb, Americans put the adverb first whereas British English uses adverbs to separate auxiliary verbs from the following infinitive or participle e.g.

American – Groups of satellite cities frequently have been developed.

British - Groups of satellite cities have frequently been developed.

iv. **Semantics:** Americans make use of slangs predominantly. This affects the meaning of words (i.e. differentiates them from British meanings). The word 'dig', for instance, means "to understand" in American English i.e. "you dig?" Other examples are:

(a) American: I don't want nothing (double negative). British: I don't want anything.

(b) Americans use 'prexy' for 'president'

(c) I need some bucks (money)

**V. Pronunciation:** We find that Americans use /u/ instead of /ju/ for words like 'tune' and 'duke'.

### **Necessary Observation**

It is imperative to establish that what we regard as modern English today was largely concluded or completed from the 16<sup>th</sup> century or the period of renaissance, which marks the early modern English period. Significantly, it was during this period that noteworthy changes which had already begun during the later Middle English period were 'perfected'. From the 18<sup>th</sup> century to date, wide and fascinating accretions have only been made to the vocabulary. It is noteworthy that, even the 18<sup>th</sup> century scholars, in spite of their prescriptive spirit, evidently confined their efforts to the vocabulary of the language. On the aspect of grammar, there is very little, perhaps infinitesimal,

modification, as evident in the various adaptable uses of the modern verb in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20 centuries Baugh (1951:213) confirms this view in relation to Orthography when he observed that “in reality, however, our spelling in its modern form had been practically established by about 1650.” Ogu (1992:251) also makes a general comment in this regard when he noted that “the greatest changes in this period (19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries) have come in vocabulary while the pattern of English has remained rather stable.”

It is also necessary to highlight the fact that, as the study shows, the vocabulary of Modern English is characterized by accretions and borrowings from French, Latin and other sources “which form so large a part of our present vocabulary” (Baugh 1951:63). According to this Scholar (ibid),

*The vocabulary of old English is almost purely Teutonic. A large part of this vocabulary moreover has disappeared from the language. When the Norman Conquest brought French into English as the language of the higher classes, much of the old English vocabulary appropriate to literature and learning died out and was replaced later by words borrowed from French and Latin. An examination of the words in an old English dictionary shows that about 85 percent of them are no longer in use. Those that survive, to be sure, are basic elements of our vocabulary, and by the frequency with which they recur make up a large part of any English sentence.*

No doubt, the continued enrichment of the vocabulary is attributable to the ever-unfolding ideas and techniques and the new branches of scientific and technological investigation that have become the hallmark of the last three centuries.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, we have shown that language has significant potentials for continuous change and that the change could be triggered by a variety of causes or variables. With the English language as our case study, we have established that these variables include military invasion and annexation, contact with other languages, new scientific and technological inventions, to an upsurge in the number and creative dexterity of learned authors. Additionally, we have gone a step further to establish that changes in language manifest in definite but varied shapes, by peeping into some central issues in the first two periods (i.e. Old English and Middle English) and by focusing wholesale on the Modern English period, to show that, as Akmajianetal, (2001:339) observe,

*The English language has undergone extensive changes between the old and modern English period. Changes in grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary have made Old English no longer understandable to speakers of modern English. Nevertheless, speakers of modern English are able to recognize old English as a relative of their familiar language.*

It is necessary to mention that all these processes of change and their causative factors are covered by the two theories that were adopted for the study. The functionalist theory as espoused by M.A.K. Halliday, for instance, takes care of the lexical changes in the language, particularly during the Norman invasion of 1066 which witnessed the historic exodus of French words into the language,



and the modern English era in which significant changes have occurred in the vocabulary, triggered by the sundry factors we have discussed in detail in the foregoing discourse. The substratum theory, on the other hand, accounts for changes in all other aspects of the language (i.e. orthography, morphology, semantics, syntax, phonology, etc) across all the three distinctive periods, particularly as occasioned by language contact through invasion, trade, travels or immigration, etc.

One fact that emerges from the continual growth or development of the language, as the study shows and which no serious researcher can gloss over is that, at every point, the language has served its primary function of creativity and communication effectively. This fact makes it clear that the perceptible changes at various stages of its history are mere historical but inevitable milestones, precipitating neither gain nor loss in the process. Akmajian et al (2001:338-339) observe that,

*In the past, language change has been viewed variously as decay and as progress, but at present neither of these views seems appropriate or true. Languages seem to maintain a balance in expressiveness and grammatical complexity over time.... The (English) language has changed radically (in the past fifteen hundred years), but there is not a shred of evidence that it has lost any of its powers of expression.*

What is certain or predictable is that significant additions, adaptations and modifications to the language, would continue into the future. Akmajian et al (2001:315) corroborate this prognosis *inter alia*:

*...our contemporary language will continue this process of change, as well, until eventually there will come a generation that will need subtitles in order to understand the English of twenty-first-century movies.*

#### **References**

- Adeyanju, D. (2004). "Historicity and Language Function: A Case of the English Language in Nigeria." In Oyeleye, L. (Ed.) *Language and Discourse in Society*. Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd.
- Algeo, J. (2010). *The Origins and Development of the English language*. Boston: Wadsworth.
- Akmajian, A., et al (2001). *Linguistics: An Introduction to Language and communication*. Cambridge: MIT
- Brook, G. L. (1958). *History of the English Language*. London: Andre Deutsh Ltd.
- Baugh, A.C. (1951). *A History of the English Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.
- Crystal, D. (1987). *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Finegan, E. (2004). *Language: its structure and Use*. Massachusetts: Tomson Wadsworth.
- Francis, N. (1963). *The History of English*. New York: Norton & Co. Inc.
- Lubega, S. (1989). "English as an International Language- the Concept and Misconception." In *Journal of English as a Second Language*. No1, Ile-Ife: Ogunbiyi Printing Works.
- McCrum, R. (2002). *The History of English*. New York: Norton & Faber and BBC Books.
- McGregor, W.B. (2009). *Linguistics: An Introduction*. London: Continuum International Publishing Group.
- Millar, R.M. (2007). *Trask's Historical Linguistics*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London: Hodder Education.
- Ogu, J.N. (1992). *A Historical Survey of English and the Nigeria Situation*. Lagos: Kraft books Ltd.
- Syal, P. & Jindal, D.V. (2007). *An Introduction to Linguistics: Language, Grammar and Semantics*. New Delhi: PHI learning Private Limited.
- Yule, G. (1985). *The Study of Language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.