

Concepts in English Linguistics

Session 11: Middle English

Block printing Printing using a solid block of type; mostly used for illustrations

Caxton, William First printer in England (Westminster, 1476); editor of the *Canterbury Tales*

Chancery English The standard administrative dialect after c. 1430 when English became the language of administration

Grammatical gender The assignment of linguistic gender on grammatical grounds only, with disregard for whether a noun refers to a man, woman, or thing: *das Mädchen, der Auftrag; þæt wif, se wīsdōm*

Gutenberg, Johannes Western inventor of movable type (c. 1440).

Homorganic vowel lengthening A late Old English development in which a sonorant (/l m n ŋ r/) followed by a stop produced using (almost) the same organs caused lengthening of the preceding vowel: *gold, word, climban, eorl, murnan*

Inflectional levelling A tendency for inflectional morphemes to converge towards a single form, so that they become formally indistinguishable. In Middle English, vowels in many inflectional suffixes converged towards a front or central mid-close vowel (i.e. /e/ or /ɛ/) which was then often lost altogether, along with any following consonant.

Middle English Open Syllable Lengthening The lengthening in the thirteenth and fourteenth century of vowels at syllable's end: *bāken, hōpen, tāken, bēver*

Movable type A printing technique whereby each grapheme (letter or ligature) is represented by a separate piece of type; a page of type is formed by combining these pieces into a block.

Natural gender The assignment of linguistic gender according to the gender identity of the referent: masculine for men, feminine for women, neuter for inanimate concepts and sometimes animals

Shortening before consonant clusters A late Old English shortening of vowels before a cluster of three consonants; in the Middle English period, it also occurred before a cluster of two: *gōdspell* > *godspell*; *cēpte* > *cepte*

Trisyllabic shortening A late Old English shortening of vowels before a cluster of two consonants; in the Middle English period, it also occurred before a single consonant: *blētsian* > *bletsian*; *sūþerne* > *superne*; *dēorlingas* > *darlings*. This explains pairs like *impede/impediment*, *profane/profanity*