

EL2211 Historical Variation in English

(Sem 2, 2011/12)

Tutorial No. 1

1. Have a look at the following five translations of the Lord's Prayer (in Matthew 6.9).

- Our Father in heaven, may your name be held holy. (*The New Jerusalem Bible*, 1985)
- Our Father who art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. (*Revised Standard Version*, 1946)
- Our father which art in heauen, hallowed be thy Name. (*Authorised Version*, 1611; original spelling)
- Oure fadir, þat art in heuenys, halewid be þi name. (*Wycliffite Bible*, c. 1385)
- Du ure fæder, þe eart on heofonum, sy þin nama gehalgod. (*Ælfric*, c. 990)

(a) Has the English alphabet remained the same through time? What has changed?

(b) Do you think that Biblical language provides a reliable indication of the language use of the time?

2. Examine the information about the spellings of *quarter* from the OED:

Forms:

α. ME **quarder**, ME **quarten** (plural, transmission error), ME **quarterces** (plural, transmission error), ME **quartier**, ME **quartyer**, ME **quartyr**, ME **quatar**, ME **quatter**, ME **qwatteer**, ME–15 **quartar**, ME–15 **quartir**, ME–15 **quartre**, ME–15 (17– *Eng. regional*) **quater**, ME–16 **quartere**, ME–16 **qwarter**, ME– **quarter**, 15 **quartter**, 15 **quorter**, 15 **qwartter**, 16 **qwartyr**, 19– **quahteh** (*Eng. regional*(*Yorks.*)); *Sc.* pre-17 **quartar**, pre-17 **quartare**, pre-17 **quartir**, pre-17 **quartor**, pre-17 **quarture**, pre-17 **quartyr**, pre-17 **quatif**, pre-17 **quattris** (plural), pre-17 **quarter**, pre-17 **qwartar**, pre-17 **quartare**, pre-17 **qwarter**, pre-17 **quartere**, pre-17 17– **quarter**, 19– **quorter** (*north-east.*).

β. 1ME (18 *Eng. regional* (*Yorks.*)) **wharter**; *Sc.* pre-17 **quhairter**, pre-17 **quharter**, 18– **wharter** (*Shetland*), 19– **wharter** (*Shetland*), 19– **whartir** (*Shetland*).

γ. 15 **cauter**, 16 **coter**; *Sc.* (*north-east.*) 17– **corter**, 18 **korter**; *Irish English* (*south.*) 18 **cortere**, 18 **curthere**.

And here is a part of the etymological information on *quarter*:

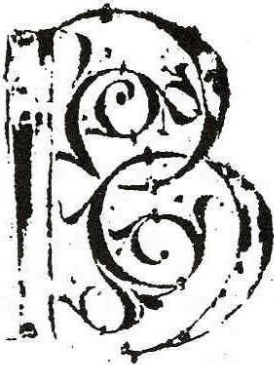
Anglo-Norman *quarter*, *quartier*, *quartere*, *quartre*, *quater* and Old French, Middle French, French *quartier* ... < classical Latin *quartārius* fourth part of any measure, especially of a sextarius, in post-classical Latin also a quarter of an aureus, a small gold piece (4th cent.) < *quartus* fourth (see [quart n.¹](#)) + -*ārius-er suffix²*. ...

(a) According to the entry, in which century were there the most variant spellings?

(b) Suggest some reasons for this.

(c) Why is the earliest spelling of the word in Middle English and not earlier?

3. Examine this short text, originally written in the 9th century in what we now call Old English or Anglo-Saxon. At that time, the language was called *Englisc*. The following is a facsimile of the beginning which describes the island of Britain



brittene igland is ehta hund mila lang
 7 twa hund brad. 7 her sind on þis
 iglande fif geþeode. englisc. 7 brit
 tisc. 7 wilsc. 7 scyttisc. 7 pyhtisc. 7
 boc leden. Erest weron bugend þises

landes brittes.

Here is the same text again because the letter shapes are a little different from what you will be familiar with. (The letters <r>, <s> and <w> are different. Remember that <g> can be pronounced [g], [j] or [x], and <sc> is pronounced [ʃ].)

Brittene igland is ehta hund mila lang.
 7 twa hund brad. 7 her sind on þis
 iglande fif geþeode. englisc. 7 brit
 tisc. 7 wilsc. 7 scyttisc. 7 pyhtisc. 7
 boc leden. Erest weron bugend þises
 landes brittes.

And this is a word-for-word translation.

Of-Britain island is eight hundred miles long.
& two hundred broad. & here are in this
island five languages. english. & brit-
ish. & welsh. & scottish. & pictish. &
book latin. First were inhabitants of-this
land Britons.

And here is a looser translation. The scribe, rather confusingly, names British and Welsh as two languages. They are in fact a single language, so we will call it Brito-Welsh instead.

The island of Britain is eight hundred miles long and two hundred broad.
There are five languages, English, Brito-Welsh, Scottish, Pictish and Latin.
The first inhabitants of this land were the Britons.

- (a) Notice that there are two forms for our 'island' and 'this'. Pick them out and try to account for the presence of different forms. (Clue: think of the notion of inflexions.)
- (b) What is the effect of **case inflexions** on word order?
- (c) Think of how the passage is structured: is the notion of **parataxis** or **hypotaxis** relevant?
- (d) The punctuation is different as well. Comment on it.
- (e) Comment on other significant features of the OE text.

Note. Students need to treat the questions/activities as suggestions. It is not the role of tutors to provide cut-and-dried answers to the questions – simply because the answers might be open-ended in certain cases. Tutors also don't see it as their role to *complete* the tutorial worksheet, and will generally take the discussion to where the general interest lies.

To get the most of your tutorial, you must come prepared, and be prepared to talk.