



Universidad
Zaragoza

Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Evolution of English Spelling in the Light of
Middle English and Modern English Religious and
Secular Texts

Autor

Azahara Colás Serrano

Directora

Ana M^a Hornero Corisco

Facultad de Filosofía y Letras
2020/2021

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Historical Context for the Evolution of English Spelling	3
2.1 Sources of Irregularities in English Spelling.....	4
3. Spelling inconsistency during Middle English	8
3.1 The Lord's Prayer.....	8
3.2 <i>The Ormulum</i> and Orm's orthographic system	11
4. The Transition to Modern English	13
4.1. John Wyclif and the Lollards.....	14
4.2 Chancery Spelling	16
5. The Spelling Reform	18
5.1. Richard Mulcaster's <i>The Elementarie</i> (1582)	20
5.2. Texts from the 18 th century.....	21
6. Conclusions	23
7. References	25

1. Introduction

English spelling has changed since the first written expressions in Medieval Times, aside from the runic forms and the Latin belonging to the Roman Empire influence. These changes can be found in legal documents, poems, translations of biblical passages and personal thoughts preserved through time. It is important to acknowledge those changes to understand the influence not only of historical contexts, but also of the contact with other cultures and countries that prove to give some graphs, sounds or combinations an elegant and proper way to express meanings and intentions behind the words.

An analysis of religious and secular texts will show these changes. The religious context until the 14th century is relevant in terms of any written form, as vernacular or daily uses of the language in each country developed differently from Latin and more academic language. Still, those separate developments were mutually affected as people from the monasteries used the vernacular forms in their reflections and analysis, sometimes mixing it with the Latin originals and interchanging graphs among words in the same paragraphs. Precisely, the chosen documents are examples of these variations that have evolved to the current uses of the English language.

With the purpose of understanding these changes in the spelling of English, an analysis of some religious and secular fragments will be made, presenting the changes in orthography due to the mixing of Latin, Irish runes, and vernacular English. The analysis will be supplemented by the historical context that marked the evolution of English writing until its Modern spelling form.

2. Historical Context for the Evolution of English Spelling

Before the year 700, Germanic tribes from Scandinavian countries were engaged in a continuous territorial war. They landed in Britain and rejected the Celtic tribes (Smyth, 1998). The Germanic tribes spoke their original languages, which marked the beginning of an English language that did not yet exist (Blair, 2003). As a result, the origin of Old English has a direct relationship with the migration flows of the Germanic tribes to the British Isles, among which we find the Angles, Saxons, and Frisians (Baugh & Cable, 2005). In this way, the Germanic dialects were

transformed into Old English from the years 700 to 1100. It was first written with the runic alphabet and then Latin was introduced (Baugh & Cable, 2005).

Old English was a more flexible language than the present one and the order of words in prayer was freer. It had a dual number for personal pronouns, four noun declensions and two for adjectives, as well as gender variation. Verbal conjugation had only two tenses: the present, which also acquired the value of present future, and the past (Baker, 2012).

Otherwise, the evolution of English spelling may be related to the spread of the biblical message as well as the cultural, political, and social changes that marked the history of England. Spelling uses that missionaries and church officials made of the Bible and other books to spread the Christian message at the end of the 6th century had Latin and Irish as part of the basis for the configuration of a written English form (Scragg, 1974).

2.1 Sources of Irregularities in English Spelling

Latin was the official language of the Roman Empire. After the Empire fell in 476, a division occurred in the territories with different kings claiming their control and stating the administrative and social organizations of their territories (Baugh & Cable, 2005).

Ireland had a huge relevance as part of its closeness to the Christian message, so the English language contained runic graphs with Irish origin for administrative and ordinary uses (Scragg, 1974). In 597 a mission to spread Christianity was put in charge of Augustine following the orders of Pope Gregory the Great having a huge impact on the configuration of English spelling (Scragg, 1974).

Christianity had a big impact on English spelling as well as on the history of England. Both writing and historical processes go hand in hand. The Christian message reached England through two sources: the Irish interpretation and the one belonging to the former Roman Empire following the indications of the Pope (Scragg, 1974).

As such, the development of English spelling and oral forms includes the combinations of Irish, Latin, and vernacular English, not only for the understanding of legal conventions but also to learn about the Bible and religious studies. An example

of these combinations can be found in many manuscripts of the 6th and 7th centuries.

Although most of the official interpretations of the Bible were written and explained in Latin, presenting the impact of the Roman Alphabet in Europe, the presence of Irish runes can also be found mixed with Latin in various documents around Europe in the 7th century, as academics wrote mixing both spelling forms. Even considering that most of the religious and academic texts were written in Latin as part of the Roman tradition, there are reflections and translations of the Gospels written in English in a combination with Irish (Scragg, 1974).

The divisions of the English territory were also common until the 9th century, often presenting conflicts between Northumbria, Mercia, Kent and West Saxon, each kingdom with different dialects and spelling conventions. The unification of spelling and the territory started under the rule of the West Saxon Royal House, with a process that tried to create a common version of English for the whole country by the 10th century (Scragg, 1974). The result is a language with a spelling presenting vocabulary and syntax differences, as well as conventions from local territories in the use of graphs and sound characterizations for the written configuration of documents and records (Thombs, 2014).

According to Scragg (1974) the dialects of the territories of the former kingdoms tended to merge and overlap in consideration of political reasons, such as the influence of one kingdom over the other. So, in the times where the Northumbrian kingdom had power over other territories such as the ones in Kent, it was common to find records where the spelling had a mixture of Northumbrian and Kentish dialects and characters. After the West Saxon Royal House was established, most of the documents in the other three regions mixed with the West Saxon configuration, to the point where only a few examples of Northumbrian, Kentish and Mercian dialects can be found without completely mixing with it (Scragg, 1974).

There are differences between the language in the 10th and 20th century (Scragg, 1974): some letters (<j, k, v, w>) were not part of the Roman alphabet, and others (<q and z>) were often avoided by the Anglo-Saxons because they were considered irrelevant or replaceable by other graphs. Other letters were added to recognize some sounds from the Latin or Irish runes, but only a few survived or were modified after the 13th century (Table 1). The former situation is described in its consequences by Solati, in accordance with Scragg, as follows:

This represents the beginning of the era commonly referred to as the Old English period. “As a whole, Old English spelling as developed in the West Saxon tradition was much nearer a one-to-one relationship with sounds” (Scragg, 1974, p. 11). In the subsequent period, however, this one-to-one relationship between spelling and sounds was gradually lost. (2013, p. 202)

What happened with the West-Saxon unification was the configuration of Old English as a connection between sounds of the language as commonly used by the people, and the spelling. The sounds mixed the way in which people listened to the pronunciation of Irish, Latin and English dialects, with the written forms of Latin, Irish runes and vernacular English (Upward & Davidson, 2011).

Anglo-Saxon Letters	Modern English
æ (ash, derived from Latin)	a
ð (eth, derived from Irish)	th (unified with thorn)
þ (thorn, runic form)	th, dh
wynn	w
z (zed)	considered unnecessary, has fought its use with <s>
q	Acquired a use derived from the French <qu>, replacing completely the use of <cw> for example in <i>cwen</i> (queen)

Table 1. Comparison between letters and their sounds used in the English Language until the 13th century and the Modern and Contemporary English Language (cf. Scragg, 1974).

England's history mixes in the 11th century with French history, after the conquest of England by William of Normandy in 1066 (Solati, 2013). Thus, an influence of French can also be found in English spelling. It is this cultural influence of different languages that makes people say that English has an irregular spelling, a product of the mixed uses of dialects characteristic of Old English, that also includes French and Greek, in relation to the studies of academic documents approved by the Church and preserved by the Roman Empire (Solati, 2013, p. 202).

Subsequently, English continues its evolution from the eleventh century due to the presence of Latin, the official language of the Church and the Norman conquest, which was consolidated with the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (Sauer, 2010).

At this moment Middle English emerged as a mixture of Romance languages, such as Norman French, and Germanic languages, being able to identify in it the syntax and order of the words. As a result, with Germanic roots, English has structures similar to Danish and Icelandic (Görlach, 2011).

However, to understand the inclusion of Romance languages in the history of the English language, it is essential to go back to the victory of William the Conqueror, who in 1066 and after his coronation as king at Westminster Abbey, decided to settle in Britain, consolidating Norman French as the official language above Old French. In this way, Norman French generated a series of substantial linguistic modifications, becoming the language of the court. Norman scribes introduced some combinations of two letters such as *<th, ch, sh, and gh>*, as happens with the letter *<w>* (formerly *vv* and *uu*) (Haeberli, 2010).

Another historical event that influenced the development of the language was the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453), which marked a decisive moment for the language, as the nobility spoke French, derived from the marriages of rulers to French wives (as is the case with Henry II), during the years 1152 and 1445. As a result, French was the language of the monarchy and the nobles, compared to English spoken by the common people (Williams, 1975).

French was not the only language spoken, as Latin also served as a vehicular language in some contexts. As said earlier, Latin was used as part of the influence of the Roman Empire in Europe, but only by members of the clergy and monks in charge of the biblical studies for the people. English was used for official records and administrative documents. But after the conquest of England by France, French became the language of the higher and educated classes in the territory, while English was mostly used by ordinary people.

The different uses caused great variations in English spelling due to pragmatic reasons: for the public to communicate with officials and lords, they developed a mix of written dialects and used the local conventions for their written versions, thus creating an irregular spelling and pronunciation (Table 2).

Word's sources or examples	Old English Spelling/Pronunciation
Use of <i><h></i> from French	<i>hour, heir, honest</i>
<i>mouse</i> (pl. <i>mice</i>) - <i>louse</i> (pl. <i>lice</i>)	<i>mus (mys) - lus (lys)</i>

<ch> French sound as /ʃ/ Latin sound as /k/	<i>chauffeur, machine</i> (French pronunciation) <i>chorus, archive</i> (Latin pronunciation)
Latinization of words	debitum: <i>debt</i> (spelled < <i>dette</i> >) insula: <i>island</i> (spelled: < <i>yland</i> >) receptum: <i>receipt</i> (spelled: < <i>receite</i> >)

Table 2. Influences on the spelling of English according to Scragg (1974), quoted by Solati (2013).

3. Spelling inconsistency during Middle English

One of the most controversial issues when studying English is its mismatch between spelling and pronunciation. The problem with English is that the spelling of a word does not correspond with its pronunciation. Moreover, many English words have not evolved in spelling since Middle English whereas their pronunciation continues changing over time, making the difference even greater. If the spelling-pronunciation correspondence is currently “chaotic”, the Middle English period presents a “catastrophic” situation. As Baugh and Cable (2005) state “there was no generally accepted system that everyone could conform to” (p. 193). In other words, people wrote as they pleased. To illustrate this point, the present-day-English word ‘night’ could be spelled as *nighte*, *niȝt(e)*, *nigt(e)*, *niht(e)*, *niȝht(e)* and *nicht(e)*, among others, during the Middle English period (Middle English Dictionary, n.d.).

Part of this spelling inconsistency can be found in religious texts. Biblical passages, prayers or interpretations of the Gospel are some of the texts translated from Latin or Irish sources to Old English to write academic records useful to the Church and its organization, or for monks to spread the Christian message to people in the different territories.

Considering the facts mentioned above, the following sections provide a brief analysis of some of the religious texts from Middle English, such as The Lord's Prayer and the appreciated evolution of English spelling in *The Ormulum*, which showed Orm's orthographic system.

3.1 The Lord's Prayer

“The Lord's Prayer” is one of these cases. This is a popular prayer because it was the way in which Jesus taught people how to talk to the Lord. Therefore, many

reproductions and translations can be found. A famous version came from 990, written by Abbot Ælfric in the West Saxon language of 990 (Scragg, 1974). This version was useful for Scragg (1974) to present the ways in which Irish graphs and Latin words influenced the written forms of Old English, for example, in the various ways in which *<th>* is used, interchanging runes and Saxon forms. Precisely another version of that prayer is going to be analysed in the following paragraphs (Figure 1).

The fragments in the current English spelling are presented by the Church of England as:

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against
us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.

The Lord's Prayer (n. d.).

The current version appears to be more accessible for everyone answering to the existing needs of the Church to include all people equally, without distinguishing ethnic, economic, or social circumstances. This context is important to consider because during the Middle Ages social stratification was crucial. Lords and aristocrats owned the land and peasants worked that land but were not part of the nobility. It was the higher classes who had access to Latin and Greek (and French in England's case), as they were more likely to be taught by the Church.

But not everyone was interested in academic studies or had time for it, as military campaigns were constant, and peasants were busy working the land. For this reason, most of the population came in contact with those languages through religious texts. As stated earlier, this is the source of the many dialects and the irregularity of English spelling and pronunciation. Monks used Latin but started to introduce the vernacular English in their writings, with the Irish and French configurations of sounds and graphs.

<p>vii.</p> <p>Fader oure þat is in heuen, Blessid be þi name to neuuen. Come to vs þi kyngdome. In heuen and erthe þi wille be done. Oure ilk-day-bred graunt vs today, And oure mysdedes forgyue vs ay. Als we do hom þat trespass us Right so haue merci v on vs, And lede vs in no foundyng, Bot shild vs fro al wicked þinge.</p>	<p>viii.</p> <p>Owre fadur þat art in hewon, Blessud be þi name to newon. Cum to vs þi kyndome. In hewon and erthe þi wyl be done. Owre ilke dayus bred grawnt vs today, And owre mysdedus forȝyf vs ay. As we do hom þat to vs trespass Ryght so haue mercy vpon vs, And lede vs into no fowndyng, But schyld vs fro all wyccud þing.</p>
--	--

Figure 1. The Lord's Prayer fragments compared in different spelling versions (Scragg, 1974)

Spelling consistency could only be found when the manuscript had been written by the same scribe or if the scribes had been disciplined in the same area (Scragg, 1974). Regarding this regional variation, Scragg (1974) shows a nice comparison of two versions of “The Lord's Prayer”, written in two different areas (Figure 1): the version on the left (vii) is from the North-East Midlands (1375) and the version on the right (viii) is from the West Midlands (ca. 1450). The first sentence in the paragraphs in Figure 1 presents changes in words that are now spelled *father* and *our*. The use of the graphs <ð> and <þ> to create the spelling <th> is confused with <d> in “*Fader*” and *Fadur*, as stated by Scragg (1974), but it is the same for *þat* to express the current “that”.

It is possible to notice in both versions that the writers tried to write *father* in the way the words sounded to them, so the connection between spelling and sound is very close. As such, the correlation between how words are pronounced and spelled is the most important characteristic that the prayer presents. It can also be noticed in words like *come/cum* (line 3), *forgyf*, *merci/mercy* (line 8), *foundyng/fowndyng* (line 9) or *wicked/wyccud* (line 10).

The word *heaven* presents the dilemma to represent the letter <v> in *Heuen* and *hewon*. <U> was sometimes confused with “wynn” in the Anglo-Saxon dialects, a letter that later became <w> (Scragg, 1974).

The Old English spelling of *us* is presented in the prayer with <v> but in other sentences appears with the <u>, giving another example of the various uses of those letters. <V> is interchangeable with <u> and <w> in words like *haue* (have), *graunt/grawnt* (grant) and *vpon* (upon).

Other examples of interchangeability are the ones that affect *<i>* and *<y>*. The letters are used depending on how the words sound to the writers: *wille/wyl* (will), *merci/mercy* (mercy), *shild/shyld* (shield) and *wicked/wyccud* (wicked). This last word comes from a pagan religion or connection with the elements, “wicca”. The use as something “evil” or wrong for humanity is a result of the Christian influence to separate the biblical teachings from ancient rites that were presented as wrong and later associated with the prosecution of witches.

Considering words like *kingdom*, *blessed*, *earth*, *bread* or *forgive*, we can see that the changes in spelling for them in both fragments of the Lord’s Prayer show different ways in which the writers understand their sounds and use them mixed with their dialects, probably considering the Irish, Latin, Greek and French graphs they have learned. The use of the *<g>* in *kyngdome* that does not appear in *kyndome* recreates those influences. Maybe an esthetical reason was also involved, something that derived in the current “kingdom” even if its pronunciation is closer to the second one.

There are several features that both scribes share. They both frequently use the final *<e>* as in *name* (line 2), *kyngdome/kyndome* (line 3), *erthe* (line 4), *done* (line 4), *oure/owre* (lines 1,5) or *lede* (line 9). There are only a few exceptions as in the different use of *come/cum* (line 3) or *foryue/forȝyf* (line 6). It can be said that scribe vii uses more frequently the final *<e>*.

3.2 The *Ormulum* and Orm’s orthographic system

To continue with the exploration of the evolution of English spelling, it is important to consider another historical example of the changes the language underwent in relation to the Norman conquest. The text in reference was written by Orm, a monk that lived in the 12th century, to teach other monks how to use vernacular English and connect to the people they were trying to explain the Bible to (Scragg, 1974).

Orm’s work is historically known as *The Ormulum*. In it, he tried to present how to pronounce every vowel and graph in an orthography invented by him and used a strict poetic meter to teach which syllables were stressed (Scragg, 1974).

An analysis of it will follow, where a sample of the text can be found:

<p>Þiss boc iss nemned Ormulum. Forrþi þatt Orr mitt wrohte.</p> <p>Icc hafe wend inntill Enngliss. Godspellles hallȝhe lare. Aftterr þatt little witt þatt me. Min Drihhtin hafeþþ lenedd.</p> <p>Annd wha-se wilenn shall þiss Boc. Efft operr sige writenn. Himm bidde icc þat he't write rihht. Swa-summ þiss boc him tæcheþþ. All þwerrt-ut aftterr þatt itt iss. Uppo þiss firrste bisne. Wibball swille rime alls her iss sett. Wibball þe fele wordess. Annd tatt he loke wel þatt he. An bocstaff write twiȝȝess. Eȝȝwhær þær itt uppo þiss boc. Iss writenn o þatt wise. Loke he wel þatt he't wrote swa. Forr he ne maȝȝ nohht elless. Onn Enngliss writenn riht te word. Þatt write he wel to soþe.</p>	<p>This book is called Ormulum Because Orm it wrought (= <i>made</i>).</p> <p>I have turned into English. (<i>The</i>) gospel's holy lore. After that little wit that me. My Lord has lent (= <i>granted</i>).</p> <p>And whoever intend shall this book. Again another time write. Him ask I that he it copy right. In the same way (<i>that</i>) this book him teaches. Entirely after (<i>the way</i>) that it is. According to this first example. With all such rhyme as here is set (<i>down</i>). With all the many words. And (<i>I ask</i>) that he look well that he. A letter writes twice. Everywhere it in this book. Is written in that way. (<i>Let him</i>) Look well that he it wrote so. For he must not else (= <i>otherwise</i>). In English write correctly the word. That (<i>should</i>) know he well for sure.</p>
---	--

Figure 2. *The Ormulum* (Freeborn, 1998, p.50)

As can be seen in Figure 2, most of the words like *iss* (line 1), *itt* (line 2), *aftterr* (line 5), *Himm* (line 10), double the consonants as part of the phonetic design Orm planned. This is a way in which, according to scholars like Sragg (1974), Orm was trying to indicate the pronunciation of a short vowel. In the same sense, one consonant appears to signal a long vowel, as shown in *write* (line 10).

A closer analysis of the text can be seen in Zottl's (2007) study. The author recognizes the value of Orm's work not only in his objective to teach about the English proper writing, but specially because he establishes "an almost homogeneous orthography; taking into consideration even various linguistic changes of his specific dialect." (p. 45).

The system Orm presents tried to preserve all the developments of the English language until his own time but found some limitations to do it with Old English uses of Latin that were not compatible with his idea of making the text readable for any

person with clear indications given by him. As Zottl (2007) states “a logical consequence would have been the invention of required new graphs; at Orm’s times, however, this meant risky business.” (p. 46). Therefore, Orm was against creating new graphs to solve the problem and decided to introduce conventions that the reader could use to read the text.

This happens in his use of familiar figures resembling graphs, for example, the pronunciation of *<ch>* in the form of /ʃ/ and the many ways to produce the /z/ sound according to the vowels and consonants accompanying the words. It also appears in the doubling of consonants mentioned before, as well as his uses of *<c>* and *<k>* according to their position in the words or the location of the vowels next to them. Such is the case of *boc* (line 11) to write *book* or *loke* (line 16) for *look*.

The aforementioned changes continued to evolve, giving way to what is known as Modern English, but the transition was also affected by the historical changes of the moment.

4. The Transition to Modern English

The need to feel closer to the people was part of the motivation of Orm to write his biblical exegesis in vernacular English. But the growing need of some monks to leave behind the Latin and academic language and be closer to their roots and their people was also part of his motivation. During the 14th century various artists, writers and church members started to feel the need to be more human and to express the connection with God in a more intimate, personal manner, without the excess of the Church or the nobility that were part of the Middle Ages.

The language continued to evolve with the contributions of Latin and Greek, as literary texts were written in English, while scientific research (medicine, botany and some legal texts) was written in Latin. Therefore, words like *skeleton*, *atmosphere* or *maternity* come from Latin. (Peters, 2011).

However, it is important to mention that, during the Renaissance, productions written in Latin are superior to those of Anglo-Saxon or Germanic origin. Latin words were mostly used by people illustrated with a good education. However, for certain authors, words of Latin origin were seen as euphemisms that served to weaken reality (Peters, 2011).

In addition, the Renaissance is marked by openness to other European countries, such as Italy, which was undergoing a period of substantial expansion in the economic, scientific, and cultural context. This also affected the English language by incorporating several terms such as *opera*, *tarot* and *carnival* (Hattaway, 2008).

Therefore, the Renaissance is a period marked by trade and travel between various areas of Europe. In this way, English has loans from different languages, as set out in the following table:

Language	Words
Arabic	<i>Alembic, admiral, elixir, cotton, algebra, alcohol, apricot</i>
Dutch	<i>Waggon, yacht</i>
Indian	<i>Arsenic, curry</i>
Persian	<i>Bazaar</i>
Amerindian	<i>Lama, tobacco, Canoe, chocolate</i>
Turkish	<i>Coffee, caviar</i>

Table 3. Words and languages Source: own elaboration

4.1. John Wyclif and the Lollards

John Wyclif was an Oxford graduate who published from 1374 onwards a series of pamphlets in which he established his theological doctrine. Some of his ideas criticized the election of the Pope, the sin and corruption among Church members and the payments for indulgences. To Wyclif and his followers, known as Lollards, only God could forgive a person, which was something that later the Protestant Reformation emphasized in the 16th century.

Although most of his texts were written in Latin (96 works, versus 65 in English) it is the use of the English language to write his doctrine and other documents that plays a very important role in the configuration of Modern English, along with the writings of Henry V (Wycliffe, 1871). It also gives an example of the transition to English as a high-class language, leaving French and Latin behind. His writings presented in the *Doctrinale* were translated by him to English so that more people could read them and inform themselves about his ideas about God, the Church and forgiveness.

Above all else, what makes Wyclif important for English spelling is his translation of the Bible to vernacular English. It is true that the Bible had been used before by scholars and monks in English, but only some fragments. Wyclif's is the first complete English version of the Bible, as part of his intent to make it available to any person as there was no difference between them and monks, because these too were prone to sin.

To be more accurate, his criticism of the Church and the idea of the supremacy of the Pope and clergy motivated his followers to complete the translation of the Bible. They were known as Lollards and their work was considered heretical by the Church, so their Bible was illegal and the copies that remain were hand copied and spread underground (Price & Ryrie, 2004).

The translation was completed in two different versions. The first, during Wyclif's life (although he was probably not involved directly in the project) and the second by the hand of John Purvey, Wyclif's secretary (Price & Ryrie, 2004). These versions of the Bible present changes in spelling that are examples of the great influence Latin and other languages had on English texts. The first version appears almost as a word-by-word equivalent of the Latin Bible in English, which made it confusing and hard to read. For this reason, a new version was necessary to make it closer to the purpose of having people in direct connection with God. Attention to the context and English graphs is part of the less latinized second version of the Bible (Figure 3).

[THE THANKSGIVING OF ISRAEL.]

[ISAIAH, ch. xii.]

Confitedor tibi, Domine, quia iratus es michi; conversus est furor tuus, et consolatus es me: I schall schryve to þee, Lord, for þou art wrapped to me; turnyd is þi breeþ, and þou comfortidist me. þat is, to be heriying of þee I schall schryve my synnes; and þat I schal do, for þei displesen þee, and maken þee wrappid to me synnyng, and I may not preie þee, but if I fordo my synne. þerfor verry schrift is levynge of synne, þat turneb þi breeþ fro me; but þou turnyst eendelees peyne which I have disserved lyvynge, into schort penaunce of a soruful herte, absteynyng fro synne. And in þat, Lord, þou comfortist me, þat þis sentence in dyverse stidis of þi lawe is approvyd, not in newe writynge and newe confirmacioun, for nobing is, to trowe soop, left out of þe sentence of þi lawe. þis comfort bowiþ into myn herte, knowynge of feelinge of þi love, delyverynge my conscience of alle byndinge errours.

Figure 1. Texts of Wycliffe (1871, p. 6).

In the example (figure 3), we can see differences in the use of the intermediate <c> in the word *schall* (shall), *schryve* (shrive) or *schort* (short). This graph was introduced for the sound /ʃ/, which was spelled in Old English as <s>, <ss>, <sch>. It finally established itself as <sh>. The French influence can be noticed in words like *penaunce* and *confirmacioun*. The vowel <u> was introduced before the nasal consonant <n> as an influence of the nasalization that characterizes the French language.

We also appreciate the change in the typography <p>, in *wrapped* (instead of wrapped). The influence of French scribes is also present in the changeability of the graphs <y> and <i>, in terms like *Synnes* (sins), *lyvyng* (Living), *dyverse* (diverse). This was used to make the reading of the manuscript easier.

We also see the use of <y> instead of <e>, as is the case with *turnyd* (turned) and *approvyd* (approved), as well as the <e> used at the end of the words, as is the case with *lawe* (law), or *feelinge* (feeling).

4.2 Chancery Spelling

Henry V plays an important role in the configuration of Modern English spelling. The regularity in his writing preserved in letters, documents and edicts, and the way it was maintained by his court, governors and even teachers or academics of the time, is what establishes a new way of standard spelling for English and gives birth to its Modern form (Richardson, 1980).

It is not clear why Henry V and his nobles started to use English as their language for communication. For Fisher (1977) it was mainly to win the favor of the common people and to claim the throne as his, in the name of his relation to King Edward III. As king, Henry IV was aware of the fragility of his claim and tried to stop people's revolutions or other claims by using vernacular English, something that Henry V, as his heir, established in all his documents, both private and public.

As we can see in the following text of the period:

1455 SC8/28/1388 Petition of the Citizens of Oxford

To the right wise and discret Comuns of this present parlement Besechen (mekely)

your contynuell Oratours the Mair and Burgeises of the towne of Oxenford that where þe said towne is charged to þe kyng our souerayn lorde yerely of a fee ferme of xl li beside and other charge of xxij li v d And ouer that at euery xvme & xe of xxiiij. li And howe þat the said towne in þe dais what tyme the same towne was thus charged with þe said sommes was full enhabited with marchauntes artificers and grete multitude of lay people And now is desolate for the more parte because of diuerse statutȝ in diuerse parlementȝ made that noo man shulde take noon apprentices but if the fadres or þe modres of þe apprentices myght spende yerely xx s of free hold So that the said lay people nowe in þe said towne of dyuers craftes may not bere þe charges aforsaid ne serue and plese the Clergie beyng in þe vniuersyte that is there.

Figure 4. Texts from anthology of chancery English (b). Source: Quod (2021).

Chancery spelling was one of the first forms of English used at court. Before that, French played a relevant role, being the official and prestigious language in the country. It is for that reason that French influence is highly significant in these documents. The author of this text (figure 4) uses interchangeably the graphs <y> and <i> in words such as *kyng*, *souerayn*, *tyme*, *vniuersyte*, *myght*. French scribes introduced them to make the reading of manuscripts easier without modification in their pronunciation.

French influence is also appreciated in the word *marchauntes*. As mentioned in Wyclif's text, French is a nasal language. Thus, some Anglo-Norman scribes introduced the vowel <u> before the nasal <n> as an influence of French nasalization. In addition to that, the word *grete* (great) shows the erased <ea> form of spelling. This mentioned group <ea> was a native form of spelling. Due to French influence, it disappeared for several years, but it was reintroduced in the 15th century.

We can also find several omissions of intermediate vowels such as *parlement* (parliament) or *plese* (please). Another important characteristic is the interchangeability of the consonant/vowel <v>/<u> in terms such as *diuerse* or *euery*. Also significant to mention is the use of final silent <e> in words such as *parte*, *towne*, *lorde*, and *nowe*. These words have a long vowel, previously marked by the macron. In the 14th century, the use of the macron disappeared. Therefore, one

device to mark that the vowel was long was by adding a final, silent *<e>*. With the passing of time, these words underwent the levelling process and this final vowel disappeared from spelling. Finally, we can find a mixture in the definite article forms. The text varies between the use of *the* and *þe*. It was the period of loss of inflections. The ancient form *þe* started to disappear in the 14th century, but as can be seen, it had not been consolidated yet.

5. The Spelling Reform

Considering the above aspects, writing and spelling varied from author to author based on very random criteria, most of them being subjective or speculative. For example, Greene wrote in 1591 in his drama *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage: 1591-1592* (Green and Grosart, 1881), the Latin word "cony" (from Latin *Cuniculus*) in ten different ways: *conny, cony, conye, conie, connye, connie, cuny, coni, cunnie, cunny*.

As a result, in the second half of the sixteenth century the first studies appear to establish the criteria for standardizing English spelling, and over the next four centuries, three basic models of spelling reform emerged (1551 to 1915):

a) Phonetic script

This doctrinal sector had been advocating a basic principle of reform: graphic representations must be an accurate reflection of pronunciation at any historical time. This phonetic view in the alphabet settings implied that each distinctive sound was represented by a letter or character (Blake, 1996).

Therefore, "as the English language has more than 40 sounds and there are only 23 effective letters in the Roman alphabet, it was then necessary to use symbols or characters which are not found in the ordinary alphabet." (Zachrisson, 1931, p. 11).

This model of spelling was defended by authors such as John Hart's *Orthographie* (1569) and Alexander Gill's *Logonomia Anglica* (1621). Isaac Pitman was also interested in reforming the spelling based on the phonetic script model, producing a series of schemes from 1842 to 1873 (Zachrisson, 1931). Moreover, in 1877, the Committee of the American Philological Association presented *The Standard Phonetic Alphabet*, with 19 letters (Zachrisson, 1931).

b) Amended Spelling

It was based on reduction, that is, they tried to “reduce as much as possible the number of already existing variants” (Zachrisson, 1931, p. 11). Bullokar was one of the fathers of this model, in which he mixed phonetic and conservative trends (Zachrisson, 1931). Bullokar wrote *Book at Large* (1580) based on the amended spelling system. In the 1870, Mr. Fry wrote *Transactions of the Phil. Soc.* which had the form of the amended spelling system.

This trend arrived at the United States with Noah Webster’s *American Dictionary* (1828) in which we find “an amended spelling of certain words or word groups” (Zachrisson, 1931, p. 20).

c) Romo Spelling

This spelling model was based exclusively on the 23 letters of the Roman alphabet. Each sound or combination of sounds must necessarily be written with the graphemes taken in Anglo-Saxon times of the Roman alphabet (Zachrisson, 1931).

Initially, in the Anglo-Saxon period the phonetic value coincided with grapheme, as the Roman alphabet had collected virtually all the phonetic variety of the Germanic tribes. Defenders of this proposal considered that the mismatch between sound and grapheme in Middle English was no obstacle to write words as they had been represented in the Anglo-Saxon era because writing is a habit acquired with learning (Zachrisson, 1931).

This model was seen as “the only possible path that might lead to success” (Zachrisson, 1931, p. 16) and several schemes such as Glossotype and Glossic appeared. Isaac Pitman, who was at first a defender of the phonetic script model, changed his mind and started defending the Romo spelling system.

The debate was polarized between defenders of a phonetic alphabet and advocates of the perpetuation of the Roman alphabet of the Anglo-Saxon era. To a large extent, different proposals were presented between those who advocated a simple, changing and up-to-date graphic representation of the pronunciation of the language at a given historical time and those advocating for a stable spelling in the

diacritical dimension based on strictly etymological criteria and derivationist criteria (Scragg, 1974).

During the confrontation of candidates between derivationists and phonetics, no progress was made in the process of spelling standardization. However, by the same inertia of reaching a minimum agreement for both positions arises a pattern of graph agreed by the printers ("Amended Spelling"), which without breaking with use and custom (basically keeping the signs of the Roman alphabet) tried to purify arbitrary and superfluous signs (Smith, 2003).

There was therefore a redevelopment of the spelling system that did not affect the very basis of that system but continued to evolve until the publication of Richard Mulcaster's work.

5.1. Richard Mulcaster's *The Elementarie* (1582)

Following the influence of Chancery Spelling and all the developments of the English Spelling through history, it is important to consider the publication of *The Elementarie* by the educator Richard Mulcaster in the 16th century, in which spelling suffered another change to make it less confusing (Cummings, 1988).

Part of his work was to present an alphabet that included the letters that are part of the spelling reform. This alphabet had uppercase and lowercase versions (Cummings, 1988). Mulcaster's uppercase alphabet had 24 letters and did not present <J, U> as part of the Roman influence (the Romans represented /j/ sound with the vowel <I>). In the lowercase version, with 27 characters, he included two types of <v> (that is, <u> and <v>) and three types of <s>. Thus, none of his alphabets includes either <J> nor <j> (Cummings, 1988).

To analyse Mulcaster's influence, an extract of *The Elementarie* has been selected:

This period of mine, and these risings to mount, as the dismounting again, till decaie ensew, do giue vs to wit, that as all things else, which belong to man be subiect to change, so the tung also is, which changeth with the most, and yet contineweth with the best. Whereupon it must nedes to be that there is som soulish substance in euerie spoken tung, which fedeth this change, euen

with perceptible means, that pretend alteration. For if anie tung be absolute, and fré from motion, it is shrined vp in books, and not ordinarie in vse, but made immortall by the register of memorie...

I take this present period of our English tung to be the verie height thereof, bycause I find it so excellentlie well fined, both for the bodie of the tung it self, and for the customarie writing thereof, as either foren workmanship can giue it glossy. Or as homewrought hailing can giue it grace.

Figure 5. Texts from the spelling reform. Source: Görlach (1991).

As Scragg (1974) states, Mulcaster's main aim was to maintain a consistency in English spelling. He followed a series of norms exerting a tremendous influence upon the spelling of the time. As a general rule, he introduced a final *<e>* for the sound /i/, in other words, he used *<ie>* instead of the PDE *<y>*, as in: *decaie* (line 2), *euerie* (line 5), *anie* (line 6), *ordinarie* (line 7), and *verie* (line 10). As mentioned, the interchangeability of *<u/v>* was one of the main characteristics of Mulcaster's work: *giue* (line 2), *vs* (line 2), *euerie* (line 5), *vp* (line 7). This interchangeability was not consolidated until the 18th century.

We can also see the omission of the second vowel in terms such as *fre* (free) in which he uses a subscript dot to indicate the vowel was long. In contrast, he dropped final vowels in words like *som* (some), to indicate they were short. Finally, we find the use of the combination *<ew>* for the sounds /ju:/, as in the word "Contineweth" (continuity).

Comparing Mulcaster with the previous text analyzed, the chancery spelling document, we can see that the native group of spelling *<ea>* has already been reintroduced. An example of this can be found in the word *means*. Moreover, the use of the definite article *the* has been "standardized" as well.

5.2. Texts from the 18th century

As mentioned above, the reforms and evolution of the English language continued during the 18th century. Therefore, to assess part of that development, in

the following sections we will analyse an eighteen-century text from Samuel Johnson's selected letters.

Samuel Johnson was a significant figure in the evolution of English spelling. He wrote the *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). As Baugh and Cable (2005) state "It exhibited the English vocabulary much more fully than had ever been done before. It offered a spelling, fixed, even if sometimes badly, that could be accepted as standard" (p. 256). It shows the consolidation of the spelling reform of the 16th century.

To see Johnson's significance, an extract from one of his letters has been selected:

My Lord:

I have been lately informed by the proprietor of *The World* that two papers, in which my "Dictionary" is recommended to the public, were written by your Lordship. To be so distinguished is an honor which, being very little accustomed to favors from the great, I know not well how to receive, or in what terms to acknowledge.

When, upon some slight encouragement, I first visited your Lordship, I was overpowered like the rest of mankind by the enchantment of your address; and could not forbear to wish that I might boast myself *le vainqueur du vainqueur de la terre*, that I might obtain that regard for which I saw the world contending; but I found my attendance so little encouraged that neither pride nor modesty would suffer me to continue it. When I had once addressed your Lordship in public, I had exhausted all the art of pleasing which a retired and uncourtly scholar can possess. I had done all that I could, and no man is well pleased to have his all neglected, be it ever so little.

Figure 6. Texts from eighteen century. Source: Brady & Wimsatt (1978).

In the text (Figure 6) we can see that there are no omissions, replacements and uses of letters used in the previous text of the other centuries, resulting in a completely understandable text more in line with current English, as is the case with the proper use of <y> in terms such as *my* (previously "ie"), or *might* (leaving behind

the term used in the past centuries as is the case with *myght*), or the use of <v> in words such as *have* (which in centuries past was replaced by the <u>).

6. Conclusions

In the religious texts analyzed as part of the presentation of Middle English spelling, the influence of Latin and other sources such as Irish are palpable. This is part of the difference between vernacular and scholar or academic languages that also reflects a social division between higher and lower classes in their use of an official language and in the mixes presented between dialects.

During the first instances of English spelling, the higher class had Latin as the official language. Monks started to use English to explain the meaning of the religious message of the Bible and created texts that borrowed a lot from the Latin sounds and graphs to create what they thought resembled the pronunciation of the vernacular language. Later French was added to the mix due to the conquest of England by the Normans, and it also replaced Latin as the official language of the higher classes until the 14th century. Texts such as the Lord's Prayer or the various reflections on Gospels helped to recreate the different versions of the first forms of English.

Such was the inspiration for someone like Orm to create a text that helped future versions of it and any other religious fragment, to spell in English by distinguishing between long and short vowels and creating a system that stopped confusion among the numerous dialects that could be found in the 12th century. He wrote *The Ormulum* with the intention to help any reader and writer to use the vernacular language and learn the message without having to know Latin or French.

The intention to be closer to the people who receive the Christian message led to the writing of the first complete English version of the bible by the followers of John Wyclif, the Lollards. To communicate with God directly, everyone should have a copy of the Bible in vernacular English to stop the hegemony of the Church and the use of Latin. This created not only a huge confusion in terms of social and political contexts, but also the possibility of developing an English form of spelling more separated from the Latin roots and closer to its common use in people's conversations.

What happened later was that spelling transcended the religious need and became a political strategy, something that can help to reach more people,

especially those that could give recognition to the reigning power. This is the situation in which Henry V and his successors appeared: English spelling made English the official language for every class and at least in this sense, erased the social distinctions inherited from the Roman Empire.

Modern English was born in this period and with it, a new configuration of spelling. A consensus was needed to create a solid nation. Education and access to new possibilities were then the main part of the development agenda and this included the configuration of English spelling with clearer rules. Sounding words was no longer the way to write, but to recognize the connection between vowels and consonants, as well as the better way to express the meaning of a word. That is what Mulcaster intended and what became the model for further changes that gave birth to contemporary English spelling. It was Samuel Johnson who finally consolidated this spelling reform. He compiled the most well-known English dictionary in history, having a way of spelling almost similar to the one that we have today.

7. References

An Anthology of Chancery English. (n.d.). U-M Library Digital Collections.
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/ChancEng>

Baker, P. S. (2012). *Introduction to Old English*. John Wiley & Sons
Baugh, A., & Cable, T. (2005). *A History of the English Language* (5th ed.). London:
Taylor & Francis e-Library.

Blair, P. H. (2003). *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*. Cambridge University
Press

Blake, N. (1996). *A History of the English Language*. Macmillan International Higher
Education.

Brady, F., & Wimsatt, W. (1978). *Samuel Johnson: Selected Poetry and Prose*.
University of California Press.

Cummings, D. W. (1988). *American English spelling: An informal description*. JHU
Press.

Fisher, J. H. (1977). Chancery and the emergence of standard written English in the
fifteenth century. *Speculum*, 52(4), 870-899. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2855378>

Freeborn, D. (1998). *From Old English to Standard English: A course book in
language variation across time*. University of Ottawa Press.

Görlach, M. (1991). *Introduction to Early Modern English*. Cambridge University
Press.

Görlach, M. (2011). Middle English-a creole?. In *Linguistics across historical and
geographical boundaries* (pp. 329-344). De Gruyter Mouton.

Greene, R., & Grosart, A. B. (1881). *A Notable Discovery of Coosnage: 1591-1592*.
University Microfilms.

Haeberli, E. (2010). Investigating Anglo-Norman Influence on Late Middle English
Syntax. *The Anglo-Norman Language and its Contexts*. Woodbridge: Boydell
and Brewer, 143-163.

Hattaway, M. (2008). *Renaissance and reformations: an introduction to early modern English literature*. John Wiley & Sons.

QUOD. (2021). An Anthology of Chancery English. Retrieved March 25, 2021, from:
<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/ChancEng>

Middle English Dictionary (n.d.). Night. In *Middle English Compendium*. Retrieved March 1, 2021, from https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED29498/track?counter=1&search_id=6024442

Peters, H. (2011). Degree Adverbs in Early Modern English. In *Studies in early modern English* (pp. 269-288). De Gruyter Mouton.

The Lord's Prayer. (s. f.). The Church of England.

<https://www.churchofengland.org/our-faith/what-we-believe/lords-prayer>

Price, D., & Ryrie, C. C. (2004). *Let it go among our people: An illustrated history of the English Bible from John Wyclif to the King James Version*. James Clarke & Co

Richardson, M. (1980). Henry V, the English chancery, and chancery English. *Speculum*, 55(4), 726-750.

Sauer, H. (2010). Knowledge of Old English in the Middle English Period?. In *Language History and Linguistic Modelling* (pp. 791-814). De Gruyter Mouton.

Scragg, D. G. (1974). *A History of English Spelling* (Illustrated ed., Vol. 3). Manchester University Press.

Smith, J. (2003). *An historical study of English: Function, form and change*. Routledge.

Smyth, A. P. (1998). The emergence of English identity, 700–1000. In *Medieval Europeans* (pp. 24-52). Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Solati, A. (2013). The Influence of English Language History on English Spelling Irregularity. *MJAL*, 5(3), 201–207.

Upward, C., & Davidson, G. (2011). *The history of English spelling*. John Wiley & Sons.

Williams, J. M. (1975). *Origins of the English language*. Simon and Schuster.

Wycliffe, J. (1871). *Select English Works of John Wyclif* (Vol. 3). Clarendon Press.

Zachrisson, R. E. (1931). Four hundred years of English spelling reform. *Studia neophilologica*, 4(1), 1-69.

Zottl, C. M. (2007). Who so wilneþ to be wijs: Concerning some major features of Orm's orthographical system of Middle English. *Concilium medii aevi*, 10, 43-52.