

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF OLD AND MODERN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATIONS

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Abstract

This is a diachronic and synchronic study that explores the contrast between Old and Modern English pronunciation, utilising the principles of contrastive analysis. The study aims to highlight the significant differences between the two periods and identify the factors that influenced the evolution of English pronunciation over time. The paper examined the sound systems of Old and Modern English and their respective phonetic features. The study used 20 examples of Old English words and their Modern English counterparts to analyse the change and variation of Old English pronunciation over time. Several dictionaries and language resources were consulted for data collection. The study used the theory of language change and variation developed by Labov (1981) to explore the differences in Old English and Modern English pronunciations. The study concludes that while there are some similarities between Old and Modern English pronunciation, there are significant differences that result from the changes that have taken place in the language over time. The findings of this study have implications for language teachers and learners, as understanding the contrast between Old and Modern English pronunciation can help learners develop a better understanding of the historical and cultural context of the language and improve their overall proficiency in English.

Keywords: Old, Modern, English, Pronunciation, Evolution

Introduction

The English language has a rich and fascinating history, spanning over 1500 years. The language we know today as English evolved from the Germanic languages spoken by the Anglo-Saxons who migrated to Britain in the 5th and 6th centuries. Old English, as it is known, was a highly inflected language with complex grammar and a vocabulary that drew heavily on Germanic languages. In the 11th century, the Norman Conquest brought French influence to the English language, resulting in the Middle English period. During this time, English was spoken alongside French, and many French words were adopted into the English language. The Great Vowel Shift, which took place in the 15th and 16th centuries, led to significant changes in the pronunciation of English words. The Modern English period began in the 16th century, and witnessed the introduction of the printing press, which standardised English spelling and grammar (Baugh & Cable, 2002). Shakespearean English, also known as Early Modern English, was spoken during this time and is still widely studied and performed today. The English language has undergone several changes throughout its history, leading to variations in pronunciation, spelling, and grammar. One of the significant changes in English occurred during the Middle Ages, when the language was spoken in Old English. Old English was spoken from the 5th to the 11th centuries in England and is vastly different from Modern English in terms of pronunciation. Although Modern English and Old English share similar grammar and vocabulary, the pronunciation of Old English is different from that of Modern English.

Pronunciation is a key aspect of language learning and communication. The English language has undergone significant changes over time, particularly in its pronunciation. This literature review aims to explore the changes in English pronunciation from Old to Modern English and their implications for language teaching. The pronunciation of Old English was different from Modern

English, with many vowel and consonant sounds that have since changed (Baugh & Cable, 2002). Old English had a series of diphthongs—two vowel sounds pronounced together—that have since merged into single vowel sounds in Modern English. Old English also had different consonant sounds, including "thorn" (þ) and "eth" (ð), which are no longer used in Modern English.

The contrast between Old English and Modern English pronunciation is a fascinating area of study, especially for linguists and scholars of the English language. It is essential to study the differences in the pronunciation of Old English and Modern English to understand the evolution of the English language over time. The study of Old and Modern English pronunciation has important implications for language learners, linguists, and educators. The differences in pronunciation can provide insights into how the language has changed and the factors that led to the development of Modern English.

Furthermore, for students learning English as a second language, learning the differences in Old and Modern English pronunciation can provide insight into how the language has developed over time. This can aid in language acquisition by providing a framework for understanding why certain words are pronounced the way they are and how they have changed over time. In addition, teaching Old and Modern English pronunciation can also increase cultural awareness and appreciation for the diverse history of the English language. By exploring the different linguistic influences on the language, students can gain a greater understanding and appreciation for the cultural diversity of the English-speaking world.

This study thus aims to explore the contrast between Old English and Modern English pronunciation, with an emphasis on the differences in the sounds and the stress patterns of the two languages. The study would involve a comparative analysis of selected lexical items in Old English and Modern English to identify the differences in pronunciation. The findings of this research can provide valuable insights into the history of the English language and its evolution. It can also enhance our understanding of the role of pronunciation in language perception and communication. The research can also provide insights into the teaching of Old English and Modern English pronunciation, with implications for language instruction and curriculum design in the comparative analysis of Old and Modern English pronunciations

Statement of the Problem

The evolution of language over time has led to significant changes in its phonetic and phonological aspects. In the case of English, the transition from Old English to Modern English marks a critical period of transformation, wherein the pronunciation of words has undergone substantial shifts. Understanding the differences between Old and Modern English pronunciation is crucial for scholars, linguists, and language learners seeking a comprehensive comprehension of the language's historical development. Therefore, there is a need to investigate and compare the pronunciation systems of Old and Modern English, shedding light on the variations that have occurred and the implications these changes have had on the linguistic landscape.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What are the main differences between the pronunciation of Old English and Modern English?
2. What are the implications for teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language?

Literature Review

Nordquist (2020) asserts that language is a dynamic system, and all its components, including phonology and semantics, are subject to change over time. These changes can either affect all instances of a particular sound or form at once, or spread gradually through the language word by word via lexical diffusion. The acceptance or rejection of linguistic innovations by the linguistic community can be influenced by sociological factors. According to Kucherova (2020) and Crystal (2004), the pronunciation of English has undergone three major periods of change: Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. Old English, also known as Anglo-Saxon, was characterised by a heavily inflected grammar and a complex system of vowel sounds. The pronunciation of Old English differed significantly from Modern English, with different vowel qualities and a system of pitch accents. Middle English, which followed Old English, saw a simplification of grammar and changes in pronunciation, including the loss of certain vowel distinctions (Brinton & Brinton, 2010). Modern English, which emerged in the 16th century, has undergone further changes in pronunciation, including the Great Vowel Shift, which changed the long vowel sounds (Nordquist, 2023; Crystal, 2004).

The implications of these changes for language teaching are significant. According to Jenkins (2000), English language teaching has traditionally focused on British and American English, which are both based on Modern English pronunciation. However, this ignores the fact that English is spoken as a second language by millions of people around the world, many of whom may have learned a different pronunciation system. Jenkins argues for the importance of "English as a Lingua Franca" (ELF), which recognises the diversity of English pronunciation and encourages learners to use English as a means of communication instead of adhering to a particular standard.

Similarly, Dalton-Puffer (2011) emphasised on the importance of teaching pronunciation as a communicative skill rather than as an isolated aspect of language learning. Dalton-Puffer suggests that language teachers should focus on helping learners develop a "phonological awareness" of English, which involves understanding the sound system of the language and how it is used in communication. This can involve activities such as listening exercises, role-playing, and dialogue practice. Dalton and Seidlhofer (1994) also emphasised the importance of considering the historical development of English pronunciation when teaching it as a second language.

Cambridge University Press and Assessment (2023) affirms the importance of intelligibility in English pronunciation. It states that having an English accent is not a requirement for learners in the Cambridge English Speaking tests. Rather, their focus is on effectively communicating their message in a clear and concise manner. This entails pronouncing individual words clearly, placing stress on the appropriate parts of words and sentences, and utilising appropriate intonation by modulating the pitch and tone of their voice. Some scholars (Denham & Lobeck, 2009; Jones, 1918) examine the changes in English pronunciation from Old English to Modern English and suggest that historical factors such as the Great Vowel Shift played a significant role in shaping the development of English pronunciation.

Overall, English pronunciation has undergone significant changes over time, from Old English to Modern English. These changes have important implications for language teaching, particularly in the recognition of the diversity of English pronunciation and the importance of teaching pronunciation as a communicative skill.

Method

Twenty (20) Old English words and their modern English equivalents were gathered through a methodical search of many dictionaries and language resources. The words were chosen based on

their use in contemporary English and their connection to Old English, whether direct or indirect. Labov's (1981) theory of language change and the descriptive method were used to analyse the development of Old English vocabulary and its impact on current English. According to Labov's theory, words' meanings can change through time as a result of cultural and social circumstances, word borrowing from other languages, and other causes.

Using this theory, the chosen terms were examined while taking into account their historical context, etymology, and cultural and societal aspects that influenced their evolution. The Old English meanings and pronunciations of the words were contrasted with the present English meanings and pronunciations, and the changes that took place were noted and thoroughly analysed.

In 1981, William Labov proposed a theory of language change and variation based on three key principles: the internal linguistic principle, the social principle, and the communicative principle. According to the internal linguistic principle, sound change is a regular and natural part of language evolution that occurs through phonological processes such as assimilation, dissimilation, and lenition. The social principle holds that language change is influenced by social factors such as age, gender, class, and ethnicity, with innovations typically originating in the speech of socially marginalised groups. Finally, the communicative principle suggests that language change occurs in response to communicative needs and constraints, with speakers adapting their language use to suit specific communicative situations. Overall, Labov's theory emphasises the complex interplay between linguistic, social, and communicative factors in driving language change and variation.

Data Analysis and Presentation

Old English	New English
1. mægden - /'mæjdən/	maiden - /'meɪdn/
2. oþer - /'oðər/	other - /'ʌðər/
3. ræd - /ræd/	counsel, advice - /'kaʊnsəl, əd'vaɪs/
4. sealt - /seɪlt/	salt - /sɔ:lt/
5. sigē - /sɪgə/	victory - /'vɪktəri/
6. sittan - /'sɪtən/	to sit - /tə 'sɪt/
7. sweord - /swɔ:rd/	sword - /sɔ:rd/
8. ungemet - /'ʌnjemət/	immeasurable, excessive - /ɪ'meɪz(ə)rəbl, ɪk'sɛsɪv/
9. up - /ʌp/	up - /ʌp/
10. weorþan - /'wɜ:ðən /	to become, to be - /tə brɪ'kʌm, tə bi:/
11. wit - /wɪt/	we, us (dual) - /wi:, ʌs/
12. wuduf - /'wʊdʊf/	wood - /wʊd/
13. yfel - /'evəl/	evil - /'i:v(ə)l/
14. æsc - /æʃ/	ash (tree) - /æʃ/
15. æfter - /ɑ:ftər/	after - /'æftər/
16. an - /æn/	one - /wʌn/
17. arcnian - /'ɑ:rtʃniən/	to arch, bend - /tu: ɑ:rtʃ, bænd/
18. becuman - /bɛ'kʌmən/	to become - /tu: brɪ'kʌm/
19. mæg - /mæj/	may, can - /meɪ, kæn/
20. æfter - /ɑ:ftər/	after - /'æftər/

Results

Labov's theory of language change suggests that changes in pronunciation occur as a result of social factors, specifically, changes in the speech community. The main differences between the pronunciation of Old English and Modern English can be explained through this theory.

In Old English, pronunciation was largely based on phonetic spelling, meaning that the pronunciation of a word could be determined by the spelling. This was due to the fact that there were no standardised spelling or pronunciation rules. In contrast, Modern English pronunciation is influenced by the standardization of spelling and the influence of other languages.

1. "mægden" in Old English is pronounced as /'mæjdən/, while "maiden" in Modern English is pronounced as /'meɪdn/. In Old English, the vowel sound "æ" is pronounced as a diphthong "ei" in Modern English.
2. "oþer" in Old English is pronounced as /'oðər/, while "other" in Modern English is pronounced as /'ʌðər/. The Old English pronunciation has a fricative "ð" sound, which is pronounced as a voiced "th" sound in Modern English. The vowel in Old English "o" is realised as "ʌ" in Modern English.
3. "ræd" in Old English is pronounced as /ræd/, while "counsel, advice" in Modern English is pronounced as /'kaʊnsəl, əd'vaɪs/. The word "ræd" in Old English has the same pronunciation as the Modern English word "rad", which means "cool" or "hip". The pronunciations in the Old and Modern English are in sharp contrast.
4. "sealt" in Old English is pronounced as /seilt/, while "salt" in Modern English is pronounced as /sɔ:lt/. The Old English pronunciation has a diphthong "ei" and a voiced "l" sound, whereas the Modern English pronunciation has a long "ɔ:" sound and an unvoiced "l" sound.
5. "sige" in Old English is pronounced as /sigə/, while "victory" in Modern English is pronounced as /'vɪktəri/. The Old English pronunciation has a short "ɪ" sound as well as the Modern English pronunciation. There is a sharp contrast in the way it is realised in Modern English.
6. "sittan" in Old English is pronounced as /'sɪtən/, while in Modern English it is realised as "to sit" and it is pronounced as /tə'sɪt/. The Old English pronunciation has a stress on the first syllable, while the Modern English pronunciation has a stress on the second syllable. While in Old English it is realised as a word, in Modern English, it is realised as a phrase.
7. "sweord" in Old English is pronounced as /swɔ:rd/, while in Modern English it realised as "sword" and it is pronounced as /sɔ:rd/. The Old English pronunciation has a long "ɔ:" sound, while the Modern English pronunciation has a long "ɔ:" sound.
8. ungemet - /'ʌnjɛmɛt/ meaning "immeasurable or excessive" /ɪ'mɛz(ə)rəbl, ɪk'sɛsɪv/. The word "ungemet" in Old English had a different pronunciation than the Modern English words "immeasurable" and "excessive." The "u" sound in "ungemet" was pronounced as a central "ʌ" sound, as in "up" or "but," while the "i" sound in "immeasurable" is pronounced as a short "ɪ" sound, as in "pin" or "kill." The two realisations of the Old and Modern English words are characterised with sharp differences. These differences reflect changes in the pronunciation of vowels, consonants, and word stress patterns over time.
9. up - /ʌp/ up - /ʌp/: In both Old and Modern English, the pronunciation of "up" remains the same.
10. weorþan - /'wɛrðən/ in Old English means "to become or to be" - /tə bɪ'kʌm/ or /tə bi:/ in Modern English. The Old English word "weorþan" is pronounced with the stress on the first syllable and a voiced dental sound "ð" representing "th" in the second syllable, whereas in Modern English, it is characterised with a phrase and different pronunciation. The stress is on the second syllable of the word "become."

11. wit - /wɪt/ in Old English means we, us (dual) - /wiː, ʌs/ in Modern English. The Old English word "wit" is pronounced with a short "ɪ" sound, while in Modern English, the vowel sound is longer, "i:" as in "we," and the pronunciation of "us" is in contrast with that of the Old English.
12. wudu - /'wudu/ in Old English means "wood"- /wʊd/ in Modern English. The pronunciation of "wudu" in Old English has two syllables 'wʊ' and 'du' with stress on the first syllable, while the Modern English "wood" has one syllable, but both words share the same pronunciation of the "w" and "d" consonants.
13. yfel - /'ɛvəl/ in Old English means "evil" - /'i:v(ə)l/ in Modern English. In Old English, the word "yfel" has a shorter vowel sound 'ɛ', whereas in Modern English, it is pronounced with a longer vowel sound 'i:'. The Old English pronunciation has a somewhat difference from that of Modern English.
14. æsc - /æʃ/ in Old English means "ash" (tree) - /æʃ/ in Modern English. Both the Old English and Modern English pronunciation of "ash" are the same, with the same "æ" vowel sound and "ʃ" consonant.
15. æfter - /ɑ:ftər/ in Old English means "after" - /'æftər/ in Modern English. The Old English word "æfter" has a longer vowel sound and the stress on the first syllable, while in Modern English, it is pronounced with a shorter vowel sound and the stress on the first syllable, too.
16. an - /æn/ in Old English means "one" - /wʌn/ in Modern English. The Old English word "an" is pronounced with a shorter vowel "æ" sound, whereas in Modern English, "one" has a central vowel "ʌ" sound.
17. arcnian - /'ɑ:rtʃniən/ in Old English means "to arch or bend" in Modern English - /tu:'ɑ:rtʃ/ or /bænd/. The Old English word "arcnian" is pronounced with the stress on the first syllable and the "c" consonant pronounced like "tʃ", while in Modern English, "to arch" is pronounced with the stress on the second syllable and the "ch" consonant pronounced like "tʃ," just like in Old English. The pronunciations are different.
18. becuman - /bɛ'kʌmən/ in Old English means "to become" - /tu: br'kʌm/ in Modern English. In Old English, the "e" sound is pronounced as /ɛ/, the "u" sound is pronounced as the central sound /ʌ/ and the stress is on the second syllable. In Modern English, the "e" sound is pronounced as /ɪ/, and the "o" sound is pronounced as /ʌ/ and the stress is on the first syllable. There is a sharp contrast in the pronunciation. While in Old English, it is realised as a word, in Modern English, it is realised as a phrase.
19. mæg - /mæj/ in Old English means 'may' and 'can' in Modern English. The pronunciation of 'mæg' in Old English includes a short vowel /æ/ and a palatal approximant /j/. The pronunciation of 'may' and 'can' in Modern English includes a diphthong /eɪ/ and a nasal consonant /m/ in "may", and a short vowel /æ/ and a nasal consonant /n/ in the word "can."
20. æfter - /ɑ:ftər/ in Old English means "after" - /'æftər/ in Modern English. The Old English word "æfter" has a longer vowel sound "ɑ:" and the stress on the first syllable, while in Modern English, it is pronounced with a shorter vowel sound "æ" and the stress on the first syllable, too.

The pronunciation of Modern English has undergone significant changes from Old English, and its evolution has undergone significant changes over time due to the following findings. The findings can be considered as the underlying factors that have shaped the changes in pronunciation.

Language Contact: The contact of English with other languages like Latin, French, and Norse led to the adoption of new words, sounds, and spellings, which influenced English pronunciation.

Sound Shifts: Sound changes, also known as phonetic shifts, occur over time, leading to the creation of new sounds and the loss of others. Examples include the Great Vowel Shift in Middle English and

the loss of final consonants in Early Modern English. This shift affected long vowels and diphthongs, leading to changes in pronunciation.

Spelling Pronunciation: The way words are spelled can influence how they are pronounced, even if the spelling does not reflect the historical pronunciation. This has been particularly significant in English because of its complex and irregular spelling system.

Social Factors: Pronunciation changes can also be influenced by social factors such as social class, education level, and regional dialects. For example, differences in pronunciation between American and British English are influenced by social and regional factors.

Language Standardization: The process of standardizing languages has also influenced English pronunciation over time. This includes the creation of dictionaries, grammar guides, and pronunciation guides, which have helped to establish a standard way of pronouncing words.

Migration and Contact with Other Languages: As English speakers have interacted with speakers of other languages, they have been exposed to new sounds and ways of articulating them. This can result in the adoption of new sounds and pronunciations, as well as the loss of some traditional sounds.

Orthography: The spelling of English words has changed over time, and this has influenced pronunciation. For example, the Great Vowel Shift in Middle English was partially driven by changes in spelling conventions, which resulted in the pronunciation of many vowels shifting upward in the mouth.

Social Factors: Pronunciation has also been influenced by social factors such as geography, socioeconomic status, and education. For example, speakers of different regional dialects may pronounce words differently, and speakers from different social classes may use different pronunciations to signal their status.

Overall, a combination of historical events, social factors, linguistic factors, regional influences, and technological advancements have shaped the changes in English pronunciation over time. The interplay of these factors continues to influence the way English is spoken and pronounced in different contexts and regions today.

Teaching and Learning English

The contrast between Old and Modern English pronunciation has several implications for teaching English as a second or foreign language. It highlights the importance of understanding the historical context of the English language to appreciate the changes that have occurred in pronunciation over time. This can help learners appreciate the complexity and richness of the language. Also, it emphasises the need for learners to develop phonemic awareness skills to distinguish between different sounds and accurately reproduce them. Teachers can incorporate activities that focus on minimal pairs and contrasting sounds to help learners develop their phonemic awareness skills.

Additionally, the contrast between Old and Modern English pronunciation underscores the importance of exposure to authentic language input. Teachers can expose learners to different accents and dialects to broaden their knowledge of the English language. Moreover, teaching the differences in pronunciation between Old and Modern English can provide students with a historical context for the English language. By understanding how the language has evolved over time, students can gain a better appreciation for the language as a living, changing entity rather than a static, unchanging entity.

Overall, the contrast between Old and Modern English pronunciation provides teachers with an opportunity to help learners develop a deeper understanding of the language's history and its

evolution over time. By incorporating activities that focus on phonemic awareness and exposure to authentic language input, teachers can help learners improve their pronunciation skills and become more proficient speakers of the English language.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the journey through time in contrasting Old and Modern English pronunciation reveals significant changes that have occurred in the pronunciation of English words over time. Factors such as historical events, foreign influences, and changes in the English language's phonological structure have impacted the way English is pronounced today. The contrastive analysis of Old and Modern English provides an opportunity to understand the complexity of the English language and appreciate the various forces that have shaped it over time. Studying the history of English pronunciation can help us appreciate the beauty and diversity of the English language and understand how it has evolved into what it is today. Further research is needed to explore effective approaches to English pronunciation teaching, particularly in the context of English as a Lingua Franca.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are suggested for teaching and learning English pronunciation:

- i. Teachers should consider introducing historical pronunciation as part of the language learning process. This can help learners appreciate the evolution of English pronunciation and understand the context in which it developed.
- ii. Audio materials should be provided to learners to help them improve their pronunciation. These materials should be modeled after native speakers and can include recordings of both modern and historical English.
- iii. Phonetics is an essential component of pronunciation learning. Teachers should focus on teaching learners the phonetic symbols and sounds of English, including the differences between the sounds of Old and Modern English.
- iv. Learning pronunciation requires regular practice. Teachers should encourage learners to practice their pronunciation regularly and provide feedback on their progress.
- v. Technology can be used to enhance pronunciation learning. Teachers can use apps and online resources to provide learners with additional practice and feedback on their pronunciation.
- vi. It is important to develop learners' awareness of the differences between Old and Modern English pronunciation. Teachers can do this by providing examples and exercises that highlight these differences.
- vii. Finally, teachers should provide learners with cultural context to help them understand the historical and social factors that have influenced the development of English pronunciation over time.

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